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# Navigation on the San Joaquin River, 1848-1925

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NAVIGATION ON THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER

1848-1925

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

University of the Pacific

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

John Wynn Birtwhistle

June, 1962

This thesis is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Rio San Joaquin (sic) rises in a lake called Buonavista (sic) . . . and falls into tidewaters at the eastern extremity of the Bay of San Francisco. This stream has a deep and tranquil current. Its waters are transparent and well stocked with salmon and other fish. It is navigable for small steamboats, about two hundred and fifty miles. . . A space sufficient for an empire. . . And thus, I believe, the valley of the San Joaquin (sic) will become the abode of a dense population, the products of whose industry will float down the placid current of that river to the great marts of that and other lands.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Farnham made that observation of the San Joaquin River and the valley through which it flowed in 1848. His knowledge of the geography of the region was inaccurate. His prophetic vision concerning the San Joaquin River was not.

This thesis is a history of the navigation on the San Joaquin River from 1848 until 1925. The main purpose of the thesis will be to examine chronologically any and all events and factors concerned with the navigation of the river during that period of time. The first chapter will survey the geo-

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas J. Farnham, Life, Adventures and Travels in California (New York: Nafis and Cornish, 1849) p. 326.



graphical and historical background of the San Joaquin River.

The emphasis will be placed on the river's use for navigation. Since the upper, southern third of the San Joaquin Valley does not drain into the San Joaquin River, only those areas between the Kings River on the south and the Cosumnes River on the north will be included in this study.

No attempt will be made to cover the development and operation of the deep water port at Stockton, except to show the destructive effects of the port movement on the old established commerce of the riverboats. The history of the deep water port at Stockton is an extensive subject by itself. The opening of the port almost completely ended true river navigation on the San Joaquin.

In the early days of steam navigation on the San Joaquin River, the stream was deep enough to serve as the northern San Joaquin Valley's commercial artery. It is pertinent to the subject of river navigation to examine the factors which closed so much of the river to commerce and navigation.



## CHAPTER II

### GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The main San Joaquin River drained the northern or lower half of the San Joaquin Valley.<sup>1</sup> The southern, more arid part, extending from the Kings River to the base of the Tehachapi Mountains, had no surface outlet under normal conditions.<sup>2</sup> The Kings River, entering the San Joaquin Valley from the Sierra Nevada Mountains south of the San Joaquin River, had formed a huge alluvial fan that projected across the valley, joining one formed by Los Gatos Creek from the Coast Ranges. This alluvial fan blocked off the part of the San Joaquin Valley to the south as an interior basin.<sup>3</sup>

The San Joaquin River rises at the crest of the Sierra Nevada northeast of Fresno, flows down the western slope until it reaches the main valley, then turns north-

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<sup>1</sup>United States Bureau of Reclamation, Department of The Interior, Central Valley Basin (Washington: Government Printing Office, August, 1949) p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Norman E.A. Hinds, Evolution of the California Landscape, California Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mines, Bulletin 158 (San Francisco: State of California, 1952), p. 50.

<sup>3</sup>Hinds, op. cit., p. 145.

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westerly down the trough of the lower San Joaquin Valley.<sup>4</sup>  
The channel of the river between Friant and the valley  
trough near Mendota passes through the plains area in a  
deep degraded canyon ten feet to one hundred feet deep  
between relatively sheer bluffs.<sup>5</sup>

The total length of the San Joaquin River is 325  
miles and it drains a total area of 14,000 square miles.<sup>6</sup>

Tributaries entering the San Joaquin River from the  
Sierra Nevada Mountains include the Fresno, Chowchilla,  
Merced, Tuolumne, and Stanislaus Rivers. The Calaveras,  
Mokelumne, and Cosumnes rivers drain directly into the  
delta of the San Joaquin.<sup>7</sup>

Since the streams draining from the Sierra Nevada  
bring practically all the water reaching the San Joaquin  
Valley, this strong dominance of drainage from the eastern  
side has given the San Joaquin Valley an unsymmetrical

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<sup>4</sup>U. S. Bureau of Reclamation, loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup>State of California, Division of Water Resources,  
Department of Public Works, Report of Sacramento-San Joaquin  
Water Supervision for 1952 (Sacramento: State Printing Office,  
November 1953) p. 20.

<sup>6</sup>Workers of the Works Progress Administration of  
Northern California, The Central Valley Project (Sacramento:  
California State Department of Education, 1942) p. 17.

<sup>7</sup>U. S. Bureau of Reclamation, loc. cit.

form. The axis of the line of lowest elevation in the valley is much closer to the Coast Ranges than to the Sierra Nevada.<sup>8</sup> The tributaries of the San Joaquin River, in an area of light precipitation, are overloaded with sediment. They do not have enough volume of water to carry the sediment away, and hence deposit it as alluvial fans.<sup>9</sup> The course of the San Joaquin River has been pushed off center by these fans, to the western side of the valley floor.<sup>10</sup>

The San Joaquin Valley was the home of the Yokuts Indians. They held the entire floor of the valley from the foot of Tehachapi Pass to the Calaveras River.<sup>11</sup> The Yokuts navigated the San Joaquin River and its tributaries as well as the swamps and lakes of the entire San Joaquin Valley in boats of bundled tules.<sup>12</sup> It was estimated that there were about fifteen to twenty thousand Yokuts living in the San Joaquin Valley when the Spanish first arrived in 1772.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Hinds, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>9</sup>Hinds, loc. cit.

<sup>10</sup>Paul F. Griffin, and Robert N. Young, California, The New Empire State (San Francisco: Fearon, 1957) p. 255.

<sup>11</sup>A. L. Kroeber, Handbook of the Indians of California (Berkeley: California Book Company, 1953) p. 475.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 531.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 488.



The Spaniards were the first white men to enter the San Joaquin Valley. The expedition of Pedro Fages was given credit as the first non-Indian group to visit the valley in March of 1772.<sup>14</sup> The first exploration of the lower San Joaquin Valley, that part drained by the San Joaquin River itself, was made in September of 1776. Led by José Moraga, the expedition first reached the San Joaquin River at a point midway between Byron Hot Springs and Bethany. The river was explored from its junction with the Calaveras River to a point in what is now Fresno County.<sup>15</sup> A second expedition, in November of 1776, retraced the route of the first. It explored and named three channels of the San Joaquin River. The west channel was called Río Pescadero; the middle channel, Río San Francisco Javier; the east channel, Río San Miguel; and the Calaveras River was given the name of Río de la Pasión.<sup>16</sup>

The name San Joaquin was given to the river in 1806 by Gabriel Moraga, son of José Moraga. He was in charge of an expedition searching for runaway neophyte Indians from the

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<sup>14</sup>Charles E. Chapman, A History of California: The Spanish Period (New York: MacMillan, 1921) p. 250.

<sup>15</sup>Wallace Smith, Garden of the Sun (Los Angeles: Lyman House, 1939) p. 28.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.



coastal missions. That expedition, besides naming the San Joaquin River, carefully explored the entire valley from the Calaveras River on the north to the Tehachapi Mountains in the south.<sup>17</sup>

The first all water exploration of the San Joaquin River occurred in 1811. Sergeant José Sánchez made a trip that year through the Carquinez Straits and explored the western, middle, and eastern channels of the San Joaquin River before returning to San Francisco Bay.<sup>18</sup>

Starting in 1812, the missions around the southern edge of San Francisco Bay sent an armed launch up the San Joaquin River each autumn. A few Spanish soldiers were in command of a crew of neophyte mission Indians. The crews of the launch raided the rancherías of the Indians along the San Joaquin and captured women and children. The captives were placed in the launch and taken back to the missions. The husbands and fathers of the captives followed along the banks and joined their captive relatives at the missions.<sup>19</sup>

The fur trappers were the next white men to enter the San Joaquin Valley. They entered the valley from both the

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<sup>17</sup>Chapman, op. cit., p. 422.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 426.

<sup>19</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 50.

north and south. The trails they blazed were soon followed by the first permanent white settlers.

Jedediah Smith, the first white man other than the Spaniards to enter the San Joaquin Valley, arrived early in February, 1827.<sup>20</sup> His party trapped and skinned over 1500 pounds of beaver pelts along the San Joaquin and its tributaries from May to October of 1827.<sup>21</sup> Ordered out of the region by the Mexican authorities of California, Jedediah Smith's party was massacred by Indians while on the way to the Columbia River. In helping Jedediah Smith and the other survivors of the massacre recover their stolen pelts from the Indians, the agents of the Hudson's Bay Company were impressed with the richness of the pelts.<sup>22</sup> The company sent an expedition to the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers in January of 1829 to trap beaver. This expedition, under the command of Alexander McLeod, reached the site of modern Stockton.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Robert Glass Cleland, Pathfinders (Los Angeles: Powell Publishing Company, 1929) p. 250.

<sup>21</sup>Maurice Sullivan, The Travels of Jedediah Smith (Santa Ana: The Fine Arts Press, 1934) p. 169.

<sup>22</sup>Don Berry, A Majority of Scoundrels, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961) p. 178.

<sup>23</sup>Dale L. Morgan, Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1953) p. 206.

From 1829 until 1843, the Hudson's Bay Company sent a fur brigade to trap the waters of the San Joaquin River system each year. The year 1831 was the only year that a brigade did not appear.<sup>24</sup> All of these brigades followed the same pattern. They left Fort Vancouver, on the Columbia River, in the fall and returned the next fall after a trapping run down the entire length of the Sacramento River; about three months spent trapping around Stockton; and a return trip up the Sacramento River.<sup>25</sup>

Most of the beaver pelts taken by the Hudson's Bay Company trappers from the area bordering the San Joaquin River were transported back to Fort Vancouver on pack horses with the returning fur brigades. There was only one documented transfer of the beaver pelts down the San Joaquin River to Yerba Buena. That was the fur brigade sent out in 1842 under the command of Laframboise.<sup>26</sup>

During the period when the Hudson's Bay Company dominated the fur trade of California, several American fur trappers visited the San Joaquin Valley. Ewing Young trapped

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<sup>24</sup>Alice Bay Maloney, Fur Brigade to the Bonaventura (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1845) p. 5.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>26</sup>E. E. Rich, The Letters of John McLoughlin. 2nd Series 1839-44 (London: The Champlain Society for the Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1943) p. 123.



the San Joaquin River for beaver in the spring of 1830.<sup>27</sup>  
The party led by Joseph Reddeford Walker also trapped the  
San Joaquin in the fall of 1833.<sup>28</sup>

The first permanent home in the San Joaquin Valley  
was made in 1836 by Jose Noriega on a land grant close to  
the mouth of the San Joaquin River near the present site of  
modern Antioch.<sup>29</sup>

Charles Weber was another settler, and one who ex-  
erted as much influence on the history of the San Joaquin  
River as any other man. Weber had entered the San Joaquin  
Valley in 1841 with the Bidwell Party. This group camped  
on the floor of the valley October 31, 1841, after crossing  
the Sierra Nevada Mountains.<sup>30</sup>

Weber made his first residence, after leaving Sutter's  
Fort, in San Jose and went into partnership there with  
William Gulnac. Gulnac was born in New York but had become  
a naturalized Mexican citizen after his marriage to a Mexican  
woman. He applied to the Mexican government for a land grant  
in the San Joaquin Valley. In June of 1844, the Mexican

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<sup>27</sup>Cleland, Pathfinders, op. cit., pp. 267-268.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>29</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>30</sup>Robert Glass Cleland, From Wilderness to Empire  
ed. Glenn Dumke (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960) p. 90.



Governor of Alta California, Micheltoarena, signed the patent granting Gulnac eleven leagues of land, or 48,607 acres.<sup>31</sup>

Gulnac's land grant was called the Rancho Campo de los Franceses and contained the campsites of the Hudson's Bay Company located in and around the site of modern Stockton.<sup>32</sup>

Gulnac's attempts to start a ranch on his land grant met with only indifferent success. The horse-stealing raids of the Indians plagued Gulnac's ranch hands as they had the trappers of the Hudson's Bay Company ten years previously. The area was still considered dangerous and inhospitable when Weber took over the land grant from his partner, Gulnac.<sup>33</sup>

In the fall of 1847, after the end of hostilities in the Mexican War, Weber established a small colony on the site of Gulnac's ranch. It was named Tuleburg until the next year when Weber renamed it Stockton for Commodore Robert Stockton.<sup>34</sup>

The navigation of the San Joaquin River began in earnest in 1846 when the sailing launch Comet moved up the

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<sup>31</sup>George H. Tinkham, History of San Joaquin County (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1909) I 262.

<sup>32</sup>V. Covert Martin, Stockton Album Through the Years (Stockton: California, 1959) p. 18.

<sup>33</sup>Tinkham, loc. cit.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

San Joaquin River to the mouth of the Stanislaus River. The Comet was the longboat of the Brooklyn, the vessel that had brought Sam Brannan and his party of Mormons to Yerba Buena the previous year. The Comet was used to carry the Mormons from San Francisco Bay to establish a new colony at New Hope at the junction of the Stanislaus and San Joaquin rivers. It made regular trips up and down the San Joaquin from San Francisco Bay, carrying supplies for the new colony.<sup>35</sup>

Weber increased the commerce on the San Joaquin the next year when he used the small sailing vessel María to transport supplies from San Francisco Bay to his colony at Tuleburg.<sup>36</sup>

In twenty years, from 1827 to 1847, a rapid change had taken place along the San Joaquin River. Jedediah Smith, in 1827 had blazed a trail through the valley that had been quickly followed by the annual brigades of the Hudson's Bay Company's fur trappers as well as Young and Walker. New American settlers had established colonies on the campsites of the fur trappers. Instead of an occasional Spanish or Mexican launch, the river carried the busy supply boats of the new settlers.

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<sup>35</sup>Martin, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

### CHAPTER III

#### STEAM NAVIGATION ON THE SAN JOAQUIN

##### THE EARLY YEARS 1849-1853

This period of navigation on the San Joaquin River opened quietly. Only a few small sailing vessels traveled the quiet water of the river. With the discovery of gold in 1848 and the subsequent gold rush of 1849, the scene on the river changed rapidly. Dozens, and then scores, of ships of all sizes and shapes navigated the San Joaquin River and its tributaries bringing men and supplies to the southern portion of the Mother Lode gold area. Stockton, as Tuleburg had just been renamed, became the supply and transportation base for this southern area which became known as the southern mines. It was a period of mushroom growth. The spectacular financial success of the early boats attracted scores of others. An oversupply of boats resulted and ruinous competition forced a reorganization and consolidation of the river boat trade.

The little bark María, purchased by Charles Weber in Oregon for four thousand dollars, opened commercial navigation on the San Joaquin River in 1848.<sup>1</sup> She was soon

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<sup>1</sup>George H. Tinkham, History of San Joaquin County, (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1909) I, p. 276.



joined by a small ferryboat that was towed up the San Joaquin River from San Francisco Bay. The ferryboat was operated on the river near the present Mossdale Y by John Doak and Bonsall. The rates charged in 1848-1850 for a trip across the narrow river, three dollars for a man and horse and eight dollars for a wagon, made it a highly profitable business.<sup>2</sup> This success encouraged the owners to build the first sailing vessel constructed on the San Joaquin River. The boat was christened, appropriately, San Joaquin. It was a schooner of forty tons and was reported to be a good sailor. Local oak trees had been used for its construction and the masts were brought down from Calaveras County.<sup>3</sup>

By the spring of 1849, the full effect of the gold rush was beginning to be felt along the San Joaquin. Small sloops and schooners were running regularly between San Francisco and Stockton. The round trip for both freight and passengers took between ten and fifteen days.<sup>4</sup> The length of time was necessitated by the reliance on the wind and sails for power and upon amateurs for river pilots. The numerous uncharted channels and sloughs of the San Joaquin

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<sup>2</sup>George H. Tinkham, History of Stockton, (San Francisco: W. M. Hinton and Company, 1880) p. 316.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 315.



River delta were an obstacle to rapid passage.

Alexander Todd bought a rowboat in 1849 and hired oarsmen to row the boat on a regular run from Sacramento to Stockton. The business was a success even though the cheapest rate charged was four dollars for a letter.<sup>5</sup> This was a good example of the fabulous profits to be made by enterprising men who had boats on the San Joaquin River during those first years. There were no accommodations. The only thing provided was raw transportation; space for a man or supplies to move from San Francisco to Stockton. The demand for supplies in Stockton itself was so great, particularly for lumber to build warehouses, houses, and stores, that Doak brought lumber up the San Joaquin River in a rather spectacular way. An ocean vessel brought the lumber from Oregon to the mouth of the San Joaquin River. There it was unloaded, made into rafts, and floated up the river to Stockton. The simple process floated the lumber on the incoming flood tides and anchored the rafts to the shore during the ebb tides. More than a hundred thousand board feet of lumber were transported to establish Stockton's first lumber yard. The schooner San Joaquin was used to replenish the supply as it was used up.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Wallace Smith, Garden of the Sun (Los Angeles: Lyman House, 1939) p. 136.

<sup>6</sup>Tinkham, History of Stockton, p. 317.

The first steamboat on the San Joaquin River was probably the Captain Sutter.<sup>7</sup> Arriving in Stockton unannounced on November 14, 1849, the owner and captain, Captain Warren, proved himself as good at public relations as at navigation. He invited everyone aboard and provided champagne to celebrate the entrance of himself and his boat into the trade and commerce of the river.<sup>8</sup>

The Captain Sutter, also known as the John A. Sutter, was represented in Stockton by agent A. H. Todd. He also was agent for the steamer Mint, which may account for some of the confusion as to whether the Mint or the Captain Sutter was the first steamboat to arrive in Stockton.<sup>9</sup>

For San Francisco--Touching at intermediate points, the steamer Captain Sutter will leave Stockton for San Francisco every Monday, and Thursday mornings, at 8:00 precisely. For freight or passage apply to the Captain aboard.<sup>10</sup>

The above advertisement in a Stockton paper in 1850 failed to mention that the charges were eighteen dollars a ton for freight, fifteen dollars for a cabin passenger, and twelve dollars for deck passage.<sup>11</sup> Despite interruptions such as

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<sup>7</sup>Jerry MacMullen, Paddle-Wheel Days in California (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1944) p. 41.

<sup>8</sup>Tinkham, History of San Joaquin County, p. 276.

<sup>9</sup>Tinkham, History of Stockton, p. 319.

<sup>10</sup>Advertisement in the Stockton Times, March 30, 1850.

<sup>11</sup>Tinkham, loc. cit.

that caused by the collision of the Captain Sutter with the steamer El Dorado on San Pablo Bay on March 22, 1850, Captain Warren was able to make a large profit from the commerce between Stockton and San Francisco.<sup>12</sup>

A news item in the Stockton Times of June 29, 1850, was able to report that, "the Captain Sutter -- after three months career and 300,000 dollars profit, to leave the San Joaquin River -- Captain Warren to take command of the El Dorado."<sup>13</sup>

The success of the Captain Sutter attracted several competitors in 1850. On April 27, 1850, the Stockton Times reported, "The steamer William Robinson, Captain A. Devoe, will leave for San Francisco, stopping at intermediate landings every Tuesday and Friday at 2 A.M. Newly fitted--in speed and accommodations second to none on the river."<sup>14</sup> The exact date that the El Dorado entered service on the San Joaquin was not reported. However, the local paper on June 29, 1850 carried the item, "First notice of steamer, El Dorado, Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at four p.m."<sup>15</sup> That was the same day that the Captain Sutter was taken off the

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<sup>12</sup>Stockton Times, March 23, 1850.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., June 29, 1850.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., April 27, 1850.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., June 29, 1850.



run. Captain Warren became captain of the El Dorado after selling the Captain Sutter so it was reasonable to assume that the El Dorado started service on the San Joaquin River in the latter part of June, 1850. The following notice in the Stockton Times of July 13, 1850 tends to confirm that idea.

Three additional steamers have been placed on the San Francisco-San Joaquin run in the last month. The Tehama, Captain Farwell, numerous berths and superior cabin accommodations, ventilated cabins and staterooms, separate ladies cabins.<sup>16</sup>

The third new addition to the steamers on the San Joaquin River in July 1850 was the Mariposa. Tinkham states that the Mariposa was brought in to break a monopoly on the river traffic controlled by the El Dorado and the William Robinson. The Stockton merchants, Heath and Emery, Starbuck and Spencer, George G. Belt, McSpedon and Company, Buffington and Lum, Buffani and Company, hired the captain of the Mariposa to carry their cargo and break the high rate structure of the combine. The resulting rate war between the Mariposa and the combine did force a reduction in freight rates to four dollars per ton. The Stockton merchants did not continue to support the Mariposa when the rates were lowered.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., July 13, 1850.

<sup>17</sup>Tinkham, History of Stockton, p. 319.

Tinkham ignores the Tehama completely when discussing the rate war. The Tehama must have been actively engaged, since she maintained a regular schedule, departing Stockton at four p.m. every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, and was large enough (60 berths) to seriously affect the commerce.<sup>18</sup> She even towed the Mariposa twenty-five miles into Stockton when the latter ship's machinery broke down.<sup>19</sup>

The Mariposa was afflicted with hard luck. Rammed by the steamer West Point on San Pablo Bay on November 2, 1850, she was towed to shallow water where she filled and settled to the bottom.<sup>20</sup> The newspaper notice of the transfer of the Mariposa to the Sacramento run on December 7, 1850 indicated that, after being raised, she was never returned to the San Joaquin River.<sup>21</sup>

The entrance of other steamboats in the fall of 1850 also probably helped to lower rates. The first notice for the steamer Sagamore, Captain George D. Griffin, appeared in the Stockton daily paper of October 6, 1850. She left Stockton at four p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Stockton Times, July 13, 1850.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., November 2, 1850.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., December 7, 1850.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., October 6, 1850.

The first disaster to river boats on the San Joaquin River run was provided by the Sagamore. She blew up at five p.m. November 1, 1850, while leaving her berth at Central Wharf in San Francisco at the start of a regular run to Stockton. Nineteen of the estimated one hundred passengers on board were killed. The coroner's jury ruled that the engineer's carelessness had caused the boilers to explode.<sup>23</sup>

Three more boats complete the roster of steamboats assigned to the San Joaquin River run in 1850. The steamers Union and Fashion both advertised regular runs from Stockton leaving at four p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.<sup>24</sup> The steamer San Joaquin, also left Stockton for San Francisco at four p.m. but on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.<sup>25</sup> A fire on the San Joaquin in October had been controlled after burning out the dining room.<sup>26</sup> The Union was the fastest of the boats, having made the passage from San Francisco to Stockton in just eight hours.<sup>27</sup> The fact that the Fashion stopped to pick up a man who had fallen overboard from the Union accounted for at least a portion of the

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., November 2, 1850.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., November 16 and December 7, 1850.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., November 23, 1850.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., October 25, 1850.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., November 23, 1850.



Fashion's poor speed record.<sup>28</sup>

The steamboats on regular runs between Stockton and San Francisco were not the only boats navigating the river at that time. The steamer Georgiana traveled between the cities of Stockton and Sacramento using a channel or slough that was named for her. She made this trip in thirteen hours in July of 1850.<sup>29</sup> The commerce between the two cities was not great enough to continue the service.

There were a number of small sailing vessels that continued to use the river through 1850. Among these was the Mary Mason, a twelve ton sloop, which was the first boat built in Stockton when she was launched on May 13, 1850.<sup>30</sup> The Stockton Times of December 21, 1850 carried an advertisement for her sale.<sup>31</sup> This was an indication that the little sailing vessels were finding the competition from the steam boats very severe.

Navigation on the San Joaquin, even without the dangers that accompanied a steam boiler, was never easy and often ended in disaster. The Stockton daily paper often carried such items as, "Capsized in the San Joaquin River

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., July 27, 1850.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., May 11, 1850.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., December 21, 1850.

about twenty miles below Stockton, a small sailing boat, about three tons burthern, sloop rigged. . . papers in name of John Lawrence."<sup>32</sup>

The sailing sloop Nautilus capsized in the San Joaquin River twenty-five miles down stream from Stockton and was a total loss.<sup>33</sup> The schooner Brooklyn had also been a total loss in Carquinez Straits on her way to Stockton.<sup>34</sup>

More successful were the sloops John L. Devolion and Alexander Frazier. The former made the round trip in five days and made at least three trips to Stockton in 1850.<sup>35</sup> The following advertisement in the Stockton Times illustrated some of the problems of the trade.

The sloop Alexander Frazier, W. T. Johnson, master. Long known to Stockton--will continue run between Stockton and San Francisco during winter--provides tarpaulins and oilcloths to protect freight--no insurance can be effected enroute--master holds himself responsible for damage.<sup>36</sup>

In the early days of the river trade on the San Joaquin River, the river captain, in many cases, owned his own vessel.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., March 16, 1850.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., June 22, 1850.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., May 25, 1850.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., April 30, 1850.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., September 28, 1850.

He ran it until it wore out, blew up, caught fire, or was sunk. Most of the boats were operated on a shoestring and the maintenance of a regular inspection or repair schedule was unknown. This was one of the reasons for the number of accidents and explosions that occurred on the steamers.<sup>37</sup>

An outstanding example of the successful river captains on the San Joaquin River in the early years of steam navigation was Captain Warren. As stated before he had made a profit of 300,000 dollars on just three months of operations. In the years between 1849 and 1854, the individual captain was the most important factor in the success or failure of each boat. Captain Warren, during 1850, bought and sold the Captain Sutter, and the El Dorado. On November 23, 1850 he left for the eastern part of the United States to purchase equipment for a new vessel.<sup>38</sup>

The new vessel was the Santa Clara. It was the first steam vessel specifically built for the San Joaquin River trade. The vessel was built in San Francisco with engines and equipment purchased by Captain Warren in the East.<sup>39</sup> Captain Warren's new vessel had a short career. Her maiden voyage from San Francisco to Stockton was on February 3, 1851,

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<sup>37</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>38</sup>Stockton Times, November 23, 1850.

<sup>39</sup>Tinkham, History of Stockton, p. 321.



and she was destroyed by fire in March of the same year while at the wharf in San Francisco.<sup>40</sup>

Very quickly Captain Warren acquired the steamer Jenny Lind to replace the loss of the Santa Clara. A small sidewheeler of 61 tons, she was a hasty and temporary replacement. Nevertheless, she was fast and set a new record of seven hours elapsed time between San Francisco and Stockton on March 18, 1851.<sup>41</sup> The San Joaquin Republican announced that Captain Warren had been replaced on the Jenny Lind on May 14, 1851.<sup>42</sup> Captain Warren was already seeking a larger and more profitable boat as a permanent replacement for the ill-fated Santa Clara.

By May of 1851, several new names had been added to the roster of steamers serving Stockton on the San Joaquin River. "Two splendid packets, the J. C. Hays and the Old Virginia, constant service Stockton to San Francisco, agents Reed and Allen," were advertised.<sup>43</sup> The Boston and the C. M. Weber were also advertising regular service leaving Stockton at four p.m. The former ran on Mondays, Wednesdays,

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<sup>40</sup>V. Covert Martin, Stockton Album Through the Years (Stockton, California, 1959) p. 78.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>San Joaquin Republican (Stockton), May 14, 1851.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

and Fridays while the latter ran on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the Mariposa had returned to her old run on the San Joaquin River.<sup>45</sup> The Mariposa, landed the first Chinese in Stockton on May 7, 1851.<sup>46</sup>

Two more disasters occurred in 1851. On June 7, "The steamer New World burst a steam pipe a short distance this side of the slough, two killed, fifteen badly scalded."<sup>47</sup> On July 4th occurred the destruction of the Captain Sutter. She blew up on the Sacramento River near Marysville but the residents of Stockton still considered her an old friend.<sup>48</sup>

Another rate war started in December of 1851. The owners of the Erastus Corning and the San Joaquin were the leaders of the war. Freight rates were driven down to almost nothing and at one point passengers were offered free trips.<sup>49</sup>

By April of 1852 the rates had been stabilized once more and the rate war was over. Freight was eight dollars

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Tinkham, History of Stockton, p. 321

<sup>47</sup>San Joaquin Republican, June 7, 1851.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., July 5, 1851.

<sup>49</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 44.

per ton and cabin fare for passengers was five dollars.

Seven steamers were on regular schedules from Stockton to San Francisco.<sup>50</sup> The San Francisco Directory for 1852-1853 showed a total of twenty-eight regularly scheduled sailing each week from the Long Wharf, Pacific Street and Broadway in San Francisco, to Stockton. Sailing time remained at four p.m. and the vessels American Eagle, Sophie, and the H. T. Clay were listed.<sup>51</sup> The Sophie had the distinction of bringing the first daily editions of San Francisco newspapers to Stockton on August 12, 1852.<sup>52</sup>

The year 1853 was notable on the San Joaquin River as one of unprecedented disaster. The boiler of the steamer R. K. Page blew up on March 22, and three passengers disappeared in the blast.<sup>53</sup> On April 11th the Jenny Lind exploded on the river off Las Pulgas Ranch and thirty-one of her one hundred and twenty-five passengers were trapped in the dining room and killed.<sup>54</sup> Then on October 18th two steamboats blew up on the same day. The American Eagle blew up at three-thirty a.m. near Three Sloughs on

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<sup>50</sup>Tinkham, History of San Joaquin County, p. 277.

<sup>51</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>52</sup>Martin, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>53</sup>California Lore (Publication of Port of Stockton: California, 1958) p. 3.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.



the down trip from Stockton. Five passengers were killed and others badly wounded. At five p.m. the same afternoon, the Stockton had a boiler explosion while still on San Francisco Bay on the up trip to Stockton. One person was killed outright and a score of others were badly scalded by the escaping steam.<sup>55</sup>

Another significant, and happier, event of 1853 was the arrival of the big ocean-going steamer, Thomas Hunt, on May 13, 1853.<sup>56</sup> Her owners sent the four hundred ton vessel as an experiment to see if vessels of her size could safely navigate the winding channels of the San Joaquin River. The trip was a success and larger vessels soon followed.<sup>57</sup>

The period of individual ownership of the steamboats on the San Joaquin River was almost over as the year 1853 closed. Two rate wars and the fierce competition generated by the introduction of larger and faster steamboats was proving too much for the small, individual owner. Operating with a minimum of capital, the large number of boiler explosions in 1852-1853 testified to the faulty maintenance supplied by the owners to their boats.

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<sup>55</sup>MacMullen, op. cit. p. 25.

<sup>56</sup>Workers of the Works Progress Administration, History of Stockton and San Joaquin County (Stockton, California: 1938) p. 38.

<sup>57</sup>Tinkham, History of San Joaquin County, p. 277.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EARLY RIVER PORTS

Charles Weber had ambitious plans for his new settlement at Stockton in 1848. The sudden influx of people and commerce that descended on the town during the gold rush days of 1849 and 1850 overwhelmed both Weber and the settlement. The merchants of the town, cooperating with Weber, organized the first local government in an effort to bring some kind of order out of the chaos that was abuilding along the waterfront. The boats and their cargos had gotten out of control. From the beginning the merchants appreciated the importance of the river commerce to the town. There was also an awareness of the rival ports which were being established to share the profits of the river trade. By 1852, Stockton had proved the superiority of its location while the other ports had gone out of business. The state legislature's designation of El Dorado Street as the head of navigation on the San Joaquin was an arbitrary and artificial act. In reality it only decided the location of a bridge.<sup>1</sup> Nature, though, by the natural

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<sup>1</sup>George H. Tinkham, History of San Joaquin County (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1909) I, p. 268.

laws of water supply, stream flow, silting and tidal action had also selected the site of Stockton as the limit of year-round navigation on the San Joaquin and its tributaries.

On Weber's orders, Richard Hammond had surveyed the site of Stockton in 1849. The town was one mile square and the blocks were arranged to take advantage of the channels and sloughs so as to provide the maximum number of lots with direct access to navigable water.<sup>2</sup> In May of 1849 the banks of Stockton Slough were already lined with many sailing craft, unloading passengers and cargos.<sup>3</sup>

Arriving at Stockton the miner must make the best bargain he can for conveyance of his freight to the mines. Some go by water a portion of the way, but the route is circuitous and tedious, on account of the numerous bends in the river, San Joaquin, and the rapidity of the current, and after reaching the head of the water navigation, it will be found that freight is nearly as high as from Stockton direct, by land.<sup>4</sup>

The above editorial warning, printed in a Stockton paper of the time, was followed by the majority of the miners arriving in town. Between two and three thousand people landed in Stockton during the month of April 1850 alone.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Stockton Times, March 16, 1850.

<sup>5</sup>George H. Tinkham, History of Stockton, (San Francisco: H. M. Hinton and Company, 1880) I, p. 320.



The majority traveled overland to the southern mines. Seventy wagon teams and numerous riders on horses and mules were counted on the road between Stockton and Sonora at one time in April 1850.<sup>6</sup>

Although Weber and Hammond had carefully provided for the survey of Stockton, there was no local government and hence no authority to regulate the commerce that was pouring into Stockton on the San Joaquin River. Boats tied up and cargos were unloaded at the most convenient spot along the banks of Stockton Slough, or Stockton Channel as it was later called. Everything was on a "first come, first served" basis. As more boats and commerce arrived, the situation along the banks became chaotic. The local merchants loudly protested and finally organized. A mass meeting was held to propose the incorporation of Stockton into a city. This meeting on June 18, 1850, drew up the following report.

Report of committee on municipal regulations. Recommend immediate incorporation. Vessels loaded with lumber or other goods may arrive in Stockton and forthwith appropriate to its own use as much of the public levee as the owner may desire, land the cargo and without charge or rent, establish a retail lumber or grocery store. That merchants, hotelkeepers and others are frequently obliged, in consequence of this monopolizing of the public

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

levees, to land their goods at distant points and pay an expensive carting to their doors.<sup>7</sup>

As a result of this meeting the County Court issued an order granting the incorporation of the City of Stockton on July 25, 1850 and authorized the election of municipal officers.<sup>8</sup> The elections were held on August 1, 1850 and a total vote of over seven hundred votes was cast.<sup>9</sup>

One of the first problems faced by the merchants and citizens of Stockton was the construction of some kind of wharves for the incoming cargo boats. Store ships were anchored along the banks of Stockton Slough, the center of port activity. Those store ships were sailing vessels which had anchored permanently along the banks and which performed the dual role of dock and warehouse. Privately owned, they often monopolized the best spots along the banks. Vessels drawing ten feet of water could anchor opposite Center Street on Stockton Slough.<sup>10</sup> Getting close enough to the banks to discharge cargo was the big problem. When it was decided to construct the first wharf, the

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<sup>7</sup>Stockton Times, June 22, 1850.

<sup>8</sup>Stockton City Directory, 1873-1874 (Stockton: W.D. Root and Company, 1873) p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Tinkham, History of San Joaquin County, p. 269.

captain-owner of one of the store ships was offered 6500 dollars for the ship. The Captain refused, saying that he intended to give his ship free of charge to the county for use as a courthouse.<sup>11</sup> By September, one wharf had been built and was being extended another fifty feet eastward along the north side of Stockton Slough and the City Council was starting construction of a one hundred foot wharf on the south side of the same slough.<sup>12</sup> A city ordinance called for "the Street Commission to report on the cost of a continuous wharf from Commerce Street to the bridge over Stockton Channel, five-twenty six feet wide, durable."<sup>13</sup> The Commission must have been efficient or the need was especially great for sealed bids were called for on October 6, 1850 for the construction of "a wharf one hundred and fifty feet by two hundred feet, two rows of piles, eight by eight, planking three inches."<sup>14</sup> When these wharfs were completed, within the space of a few months, the city fathers were next faced with the problem of maintaining them. That problem was met with a city

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<sup>11</sup>Stockton Times, March 30, 1850.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1850.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., September 28, 1850.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., October 6, 1850.



ordinance passed on January 18, 1851 which stated:

That all steamboats and sailing craft will be liable for all damages which may be done by them to the wharves within this city; and it is hereby made the duty of the harbor master to see that any damage or injury sustained be repaired at the expense of such steamboat or sailing craft.<sup>15</sup>

The construction of the wharves was only the first of many problems that the new city of Stockton had to face. Many idle and abandoned ships clogged Stockton Channel and were a serious problem for the active ships attempting to navigate the narrow waters and discharge cargo and passengers.

When Stockton Channel became too crowded, the idle ships were towed to Mormon Slough. In March of 1850, when, "Three of the store ships in front of the levee have been removed to Mormon Slough," there was a considerable rise in value of the lots along South Center Street.<sup>16</sup> The store ships did not prosper when anchored on Mormon Slough. First, they were offered for sale.<sup>17</sup> After several months they might be towed away, auctioned off, or destroyed.<sup>18</sup> The newspapers of 1850 carried dozens of notices or orders

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<sup>15</sup>Stockton Journal, January 25, 1851.

<sup>16</sup>Stockton Times, March 23, 1850.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., April 6, 1850.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., September 21, 1850.

for the removal of abandoned ships. Those ships were usually in Mormon Slough but some would be in McLeod's Lake or Stockton Channel.<sup>19</sup>

Weber, as chairman of the city council's Committee On Wharves, drew up a city ordinance which appointed a city harbor master. His duties were "to regulate and control the position of all vessels within the city limits; to keep a free passage to the wharves; and to collect a wharfage fee from the vessels using the city wharves."<sup>20</sup> Later he was given the additional duty of keeping an alphabetical list of ships arriving in Stockton.<sup>21</sup>

To relieve congestion in the harbor and to keep the cargos moving across the limited wharf space, another city ordinance stated that:

Following times shall be allowed to vessels to discharge cargo, at the landing, on the bank, or upon the levee. Vessels under sixty tons, two days; vessels from sixty to one hundred tons, three days; vessels from one hundred to one hundred-fifty tons, four days; vessels from one hundred-fifty to two hundred tons, five days; vessels from two hundred to three hundred tons, six days; vessels over three tons, seven days.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., September 21, and 28, 1850.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., August 31, 1850.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., September 7, 1850.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

The same times were allowed for loading cargo and every thing had to be off the levees within forty-eight hours, except for reshipment when the limit was raised to seventy-two hours.<sup>23</sup> The city council charged the owners of one steamer, the V. C., two hundred and fifty dollars for remaining at the wharf for twenty-one days.<sup>24</sup>

The city also collected a wharfage fee from vessels using the public wharves. Boats over thirty tons paid a rate of twenty-five cents per ton while smaller boats paid at a rate of fifty cents per ton if the boat was under ten tons.<sup>25</sup> These fees provided the city with an important source of income. The harbor master's collections for the week ending the thirty-first of May 1851, totaled \$349.73.<sup>26</sup>

The task of keeping the wharves clear was not easy. In January of 1851 the city added a new ordinance:

That the harbor master be required to clear the entire levee of Stockton Channel of all lumber goods and merchandise, before the first day of February next by notifying the owners or agents thereof, of the passage of this ordinance. That no goods, ware, or merchandise now landing or hereafter to be landed, shall remain upon any of

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>San Joaquin Republican, June 14, 1851.

<sup>25</sup>Stockton Times, August 31, 1850.

<sup>26</sup>San Joaquin Republican, June 4, 1851.



the wharves in Stockton more than twenty-four hours after the landing of the same: nor on the levees of Stockton Channel, more than forty-eight hours after being landed.<sup>27</sup>

In carrying out that ordinance, the city council refused the petition of merchants to let lumber remain on the wharves and fined the owners of three store ships to make them start paying daily wharfage rates.<sup>28</sup>

Sunken boats lying at the head of Stockton Channel, near the bridge, were ordered removed by May 24, 1851. The penalty was confiscation and public auction.<sup>29</sup>

By the summer of 1851, the harbor of Stockton had been organized and order brought to the movement of vessels to and from the city. Regulations had been applied to the actual navigation of the San Joaquin between San Francisco Bay and Stockton in June of 1850. Twelve pilots had been appointed for the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers by the newly created Board of Pilot Commissioners. Twelve pilots were also appointed for San Francisco Bay.<sup>30</sup>

The regulations were very simple and not well enforced. They allowed a captain to act as his own pilot,

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<sup>27</sup>Stockton Journal, January 24, 1851.

<sup>28</sup>San Joaquin Republican, June 25, 1851.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., May 24, 1851.

<sup>30</sup>Stockton Times, June 29, 1850.

and exempted vessels under one hundred and seventy-five tons burthen. This limitation allowed almost every vessel on the San Joaquin River in 1850 to operate without a pilot.<sup>31</sup> The authorities were beginning to take note of the problems of navigation of the San Joaquin as an editorial from a San Francisco paper of the time illustrates:

The increasing commerce on this river (San Joaquin) will require an appropriation by Congress to move some of the present obstructions to navigation. These obstructions exist only for twelve miles, and could be removed for 150,000 dollars, perhaps, so as to admit of transportation in boats as large as those that freely navigate the waters between San Francisco and Sacramento.<sup>32</sup>

The winter rains of the year 1849 turned the adobe soil of Stockton into a sea of mud. The heavy freight wagons were mired deep in the muddy, unpaved streets. Trade with booming southern mining settlements of the Mother Lode almost came to a halt. To take advantage of that situation several other towns were laid out along the upper San Joaquin and Tuolumne Rivers. The intent was to take over from Stockton the trans-shipment of goods from the San Joaquin River to the mining camps.<sup>33</sup>

The new towns of Tuolumne City, Grayson's City, San

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<sup>31</sup>Stockton Times, June 29, 1850.

<sup>32</sup>Stockton Journal, November 6, 1850.

<sup>33</sup>Tinkham, History of San Joaquin County, p. 315.

Joaquin City, and Crescent City all advertised their advantages in the Stockton papers of 1850. The following is an account of a trip from Stockton to these rival ports in May of 1850 on the steamer Georgiana.

Left Stockton in afternoon. Two hours to Bonsell's Ferry. Reached San Joaquin City at twilight. No good road here to the mines, east bank of the river is all marsh. Grayson's City, a good road to Pacheco Pass and a good road to the mines. Eight miles up the Tuolumne River from the San Joaquin River.<sup>34</sup>

Measurements were not exact since an advertisement for Tuolumne City in the Stockton Times of March 30, 1850 located the site of the town as being five miles upstream on the Tuolumne River from its junction with the San Joaquin. It was on the east bank of the river and the river was advertised as being deep enough for ships drawing six feet of water.<sup>35</sup>

During the year 1850, river navigation to these new ports were made in several stages. The steamer Captain Sutter carried freight and passengers from San Francisco to Stockton. There they were transferred to the Georgiana which maintained a semi-weekly regular run from Stockton to Grayson's City, Tuolumne City, and intermediate landings.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Stockton Times, May 4, 1850.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., March 30, 1850.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., April 27, 1850.



At Tuolumne City the freight and passengers were once more transferred to the steamer Etna which went thirty miles further up the Tuolumne River to Crescent City.<sup>37</sup>

The last segment of the Tuolumne River trade, that part served by the steamer Etna, was short lived. The last attempt of the Etna to make the run between Tuolumne City and Crescent City on May 24, 1850 ended in failure and the run was abandoned.<sup>38</sup> The Georgiana and the Mansell White continued to make the run between Stockton and Tuolumne City until the fall of 1850.<sup>39</sup>

By October 1850, the San Joaquin River was reported as being low, even though it was fifteen inches higher than the previous winter of 1849-1850.<sup>40</sup> The upriver ports of Tuolumne City and Grayson's City were reporting dull business in November with a "Hope to see Georgiana running again."<sup>41</sup> The report for December in the Stockton Times, "Dry winter--the upriver cities in agony--ferryman stand with gloomy brows watching dry river beds." was the

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., May 4, 1850.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., May 25, 1850.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., June 1, 1850.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., October 25, 1850.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., November 23, 1850.

epitaph on the gravestone of those upriver towns.<sup>42</sup> The boats did not return in the spring of 1851 and there was no significant commerce on the Tuolumne for at least another ten years.<sup>43</sup> A hard lesson had been learned. The San Joaquin River and its tributaries upstream from Stockton could not be relied upon to furnish deep enough water throughout the year for commercial navigation. Portions of the San Joaquin and its tributaries upstream from Stockton would be used again by riverboats and barges in the future but only for short periods of high water and by using Stockton as the permanent base of operations. The upriver port towns, so enthusiastically established in 1850, became ghost towns or mere landings.

Weber had misgivings about the survival of Stockton as a winter trading port because of the adobe mud. He had a survey made of another town site where the soil was sandy and could support heavy wagons during the rainy winter months. He named the town Castoria, changing it from the original name of French Camp, and published the following advertisement in the Stockton Times of September 21, 1850:

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., December 7, 1850.

<sup>43</sup>Jerry MacMullen, Paddle-Wheel Days in California (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1944) p. 83.

Head of a navigable stream of water by which most of the winter trade finds its way to the mining district. The experience of last winter is abundant proof of this fact - the winter roads thence to the mining depots are passable for packs and teams in the wettest season. Inducement to immigrants and settlers.<sup>44</sup>

There was even a proposal to start steam navigation between Stockton and French Camp (Castoria) during the winter of 1850-1851.<sup>45</sup> Stockton's merchants found the answer to the threat of this nearby potential rival port. Crushed rock and sand were hauled in to fortify the adobe mud of the important streets. The river boats continued to make Stockton the winter as well as the summer terminal. The freight wagons continued to transport the freight from the wharves and levees along Stockton Channel to the mining camps of the southern mines. Stockton was now firmly established as the only important port on the San Joaquin and its tributaries.

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<sup>44</sup>Stockton Times, September 21, 1850.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., December 7, 1850.



## CHAPTER V

### "THE COMBINATION" - THE YEARS 1854-1871

To the influential and ordinary citizens of Stockton, The California Steam Navigation Company was known as the "combination". It was spelled both with a small "c" and a capital "C" at various times but the name always meant the same thing. From the time of the organization of the company until its sale in 1871, it was regarded by the citizens of Stockton as a foreign monopoly. Although there was almost constant protest and sometimes concerted action, the monopoly was never successfully attacked, much less beaten.

Up until the close of 1853, the steamers on the San Joaquin River had been individually owned and operated. The San Joaquin Republican, January 2, 1854, still carried the advertisements for the Sophie, the H. T. Clay, and the Cornelia. The Cornelia was taking the place of the steamer American Eagle, which was being withdrawn for overhaul.<sup>1</sup> The competing steamers had worked out a measure of cooperation, since they ran on alternate days, departed at the same hour, and had standardized many of their routine procedures. By February 8, 1854, the American Eagle had resumed her regular run, leaving Stockton at four p.m. every

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<sup>1</sup>San Joaquin Republican, January 2, 1854.

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for San Francisco.<sup>2</sup>

There were too many boats for the amount of passengers and freight available on both the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers. The following advertisement in the San Joaquin Republican for February 11, 1854, was a sign of the times:

Steamboat for sale, the sternwheel steamboat Stockton, from eighty to one hundred tons freight capacity, drawing a light capacity of water, and well adapted for the Marysville or Shasta trade, having a new boiler. . . is now offered for sale on favorable terms.<sup>3</sup>

The day of the individually-owned steamboats was almost over. The San Joaquin Republican of March 8, 1854, carried the last advertisements for the individually owned boats.<sup>4</sup>

The majority of the independent steamboat owners had pooled their boats and formed the California Steam Navigation Company. The company was incorporated on February 22, 1854. It was capitalized at two and one half million dollars. R. P. Cheney was chosen as the first president.<sup>5</sup> All of the independent steamboats that had been operating on the San Joaquin River between Stockton

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., February 8, 1854.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., February 11, 1854.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., March 8, 1854.

<sup>5</sup>J. W. Woolridge, History of Sacramento Valley, (Chicago: The Pioneer Historical Publishing Co., 1931) p. 131.

and San Francisco joined. In addition, the list of steamers pooled in the new company by their owners included the Senator, New World, Antelope, Wilson G. Hunt, Confidence, Thomas Hill, Helen Hensley, Kate Kearney, Hartford, Urilda, J. Bragdon, Comanche, Pike, Gazelle, Plumas, Belle, Gem, and the Cleopatra.<sup>6</sup>

When the California Steam Navigation Company took over the San Joaquin River commerce on March 9, 1854, there was no interruption of service. Two of the same steamboats that had been in independent service between Stockton and San Francisco were retained, the H. T. Clay and the Cornelia.<sup>7</sup> The Sophie and the American Eagle had been temporarily withdrawn from the Stockton run. The two boats left San Francisco and Stockton on alternating days at four p.m. maintaining a service on every day except Sunday.<sup>8</sup>

There was an immediate attempt to provide opposition or competition to the new monopoly. An advertisement in the same paper as that of the California Steam Navigation Company's advertisement for March 9, 1854 read:

Opposition to combination. The sloop Maggie Bowers will leave Stockton for San Francisco, regularly March 6. She is running

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> San Joaquin Republican, March 9, 1854.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



in connection with other first class clipper vessels and has good accommodations for freight and passengers. Freight \$5.00 per ton; passengers \$3.00.

The advertisement was repeated for a little more than a week and then disappeared. Evidently, passengers were not willing to put up with a five day voyage between Stockton and San Francisco instead of the overnight trip by steamer just to oppose the "combination". The little sailing sloop Maggie Bowers continued to operate on the river but only as a freighter. She could carry freight at three dollars a ton and still make a profit. There was freight available for the sailing vessels on the river, because on March 10, 1854, the California Steam Navigation Company set the freight rate on its boats at eight dollars per ton.<sup>10</sup>

Only two steamboats, the American Eagle and the Cornelia, were operated by the company on the San Joaquin during April of 1854.<sup>11</sup> In May the service was doubled with the addition of the Sophie and the H. T. Clay. Often both ships scheduled for the same day did not run, one being held in reserve.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., March 9, 1854.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., March 29, 1854.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., April 19, 1854.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., May 8, 1854.

Although the San Joaquin Republican rejoiced when a schooner, the Reporter, made the trip from San Francisco to Stockton in fifteen hours, the average time of the steamboat American Eagle, no steamboats offered any competition to the California Steam Navigation Company on the San Joaquin River during 1854.<sup>13</sup> Private and public indignation against the monopolistic rates and services of the company grew.

The California Steam Navigation Company had become the hated "combination" to the majority of the citizens of Stockton. An editorial in the San Joaquin Republican complained:

We often hear persons express their surprise that Stockton does not advance in wealth and population as Sacramento, and ask the question "What is it? What is the cause?". . . Hence we see that, when the combination controlled the freight and traffic of the Sacramento River, it imposed a heavy tariff on passengers and goods. The citizens of Marysville determined to resist the exorbitant prices of this company, and for that purpose combined their capital; and the consequences, that three or four splendid opposition boats are now competing successfully for the trade of the Sacramento River. But there has not been a corresponding opposition on the San Joaquin River, and hence the interests of Stockton have materially suffered.<sup>14</sup>

The freight rates charged by the combination did not bother the people in Stockton, it was the rates charged for

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., September 11, 1854.

<sup>14</sup>Editorial, San Joaquin Republican, December 6, 1854.

passengers. The "combination" ran boats on the Sacramento-San Francisco run and charged \$4.00 cabin fare and fifty cents steerage (deck). The same company ran its boats on the San Francisco-Stockton run and charged \$8.00 cabin fare and \$4.00 for steerage.<sup>15</sup> The runs were approximately identical in distance and time. Stockton felt discriminated against!

The steam combination is a monopoly that has become oppressive to the interests of the people of the whole of the San Joaquin District, from the fact that it maintains such high prices of passage, that it turns almost the entire immigration to the state, into the northern mines. It may double the price of freight, and who cares, because the sailing vessels are competing, and already carry for \$3.00 a ton while the steamers get \$5.00.<sup>16</sup>

The people in Stockton were willing to settle if the "combination" would equalize the passenger rates on the Stockton and Sacramento river runs.<sup>17</sup> The "combination" felt that they had gone far enough when they equalized just the freight rates to \$5.00 per ton for the runs on the two rivers on October 1, 1854.<sup>18</sup> There was no move to reduce the fares for passengers on the San Joaquin River run and

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<sup>15</sup> Editorial, San Joaquin Republican, December 18, 1854.

<sup>16</sup> Editorial, San Joaquin Republican, December 20, 1854.

<sup>17</sup> Editorial, San Joaquin Republican, December 25, 1854.

<sup>18</sup> San Joaquin Republican, December 17, 1854.



the company ran only the steamers Cornelia and Urilda for the months of December, 1854 and January, 1855.<sup>19</sup>

The feeling of the citizens of Stockton opposing the "combination" reached the boiling point in January of 1855. Arguments were rapidly solidifying into definite plans.

Emmons and Davis. . . have furnished us with a beautiful model for a steamboat in every way adapted to the Stockton and San Francisco trade. The model is for a boat 148 feet in length; breadth of beam 28 feet; and depth of hold 6 feet; draught  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet light, and 5 feet loaded; capacity 250 tons. In size, she would not differ from the Cornelia.<sup>20</sup>

A large mass meeting was held in City Hall on the night of January 6, 1855 to hear the report of a committee. The committee had been canvassing the city to obtain subscriptions to buy or build a steamer to ply between San Francisco and Stockton. The committee was able to report that it had pledges for sale of \$28,300 worth of stock but proposed a further canvass of the nearby communities and the southern mining areas to raise a total subscription of \$40,000.<sup>21</sup> The committee was appointed to select some candidates for a board of directors to run the proposed

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., January 3, 1855.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., January 4, 1855.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., January 7, 1855.

steamboat company.<sup>22</sup>

Events were moving quickly towards the formation of an opposition steamboat company when the San Joaquin Republican offered both caution and advice in the following editorial on January 13, 1855.

At this time the California Steam Navigation Company have some twelve or fourteen steamers lying idle at Sacramento. The Eclipse, the Queen City, the Wallamette [sic] , and the Anne Abernathy are independent boats and running on the Sacramento against the combination. . . . The Eclipse and the Queen City will continue on the Sacramento and the Wallamette [sic] and Anne Abernathy will be put on the Stockton line. We do not know that this is contemplated but it seems to us that such must be the inevitable result. . . . It is a very important question whether it would be better to purchase these two boats, or any other boats suitable for the San Joaquin River, or contract for the building of new ones. . . . Steamboating in California is overdone. There are more boats here than can be employed profitably, and they can now be had for one half what they cost two years ago.<sup>23</sup>

The editor of the paper was either extremely gifted at prophecy or else he strongly influenced the newly formed citizens committee, for on January 23, 1855, it was announced that the committee of the newly formed Southern Miner's Steamboat Association had made arrangements to place the steamer Willamette on the San Joaquin River.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>San Joaquin Republican, January 12, 1855.

<sup>23</sup>Editorial, San Joaquin Republican, January 13, 1855.

<sup>24</sup>San Joaquin Republican, January 23, 1855.

"At an early hour yesterday morning, the ringing of bells and the boom of cannon announced the arrival of an opposition steamer."<sup>25</sup> The Willamette had arrived on her first voyage from San Francisco to Stockton early on the morning of January 24, 1855. She brought over one hundred passengers and 160 tons of freight.<sup>26</sup> Large crowds lined the levees along Stockton Channel that night to see the long hoped-for sight of two competing steamboats leaving the city.<sup>27</sup>

The "combination" had moved swiftly to fight the new competitor. As the California Steam Navigation Company's Urilda backed away from the Stockton wharf, her cabin passengers were paying only \$2.00 for the one way trip and the steerage passengers had paid a mere fifty cents. The Willamette had charged the enthusiastic Stocktonians who were demonstrating their support of its new competitor by taking passage that night, \$3.00 for first class fare and \$1.00 for the deck steerage.<sup>28</sup> By February 2, 1855, freight charges had been lowered to \$3.00 per ton by the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., January 25, 1855.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



ships of the "combination".<sup>29</sup>

The Southern Miner's Steamboat Association was petitioning the state legislature for a charter on January 26, 1855.<sup>30</sup> It was already too late. The Stockton papers were strangely silent about a second or any other trip of the Willamette to Stockton. The opposition steamer had made one glorious round trip. Whatever the reason, or reasons were that prevented the Willamette from continuing the run, they were completely and immediately effective. In the short space of two weeks, the California Steam Navigation Company was advertising fares of \$7.00 first class for a cabin between Stockton and San Francisco and \$4.00 for steerage.<sup>31</sup> This was not only four dollars higher than their rate reduction when the Willamette appeared, but it was one dollar higher than their regular rates before the Willamette was hired. The "combination" seemed delighted to rub salt into the wound of the opposing citizens of Stockton by advertising the new rates as "reduced" rates!<sup>32</sup>

The California Steam Navigation Company had, on

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., February 2, 1855.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., January 27, 1855.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., February 8, 1855.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

February 7, 1855, made a deal with its competition on the Sacramento. The competition, the Citizen's Line, was the company formed by the citizens of Marysville. On January 13, 1855, the voters of Marysville, 1199 to 13, voted to take stock to the amount of \$100,000.00 in the Citizen's Line.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the collusion between the hated "combination" and what seemed to be the white hope of publicly-owned competition helped disillusion the people in Stockton who had tried to organize a publicly-owned opposition. At any rate, the Citizen's Line and the California Steam Navigation Company standardized their rates on the Sacramento River at seven dollars for cabin passengers and four dollars for deck or steerage passengers. The use of the much disliked runners, to solicit passengers before each sailing time, was discontinued by mutual agreement.<sup>34</sup> The California Steam Navigation Company applied the Sacramento River rates to the San Joaquin River. On February 10, 1855 the freight rates were likewise raised to six dollars per ton on both rivers.<sup>35</sup>

What had happened to the Southern Miner's Steamboat Association? The citizens of Stockton wanted to know.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., January 14, 1855.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., February 8, 1855.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., February 13, 1855.

Another mass meeting was called at City Hall on the 17th of February, 1855. There was no chairman and no spokesman. Mayor Buffington had a good idea of what the crowd wanted, though, and took over the meeting. He assured them that all was going well with the Southern Miner's Steamboat Association. The meeting was adjourned for two weeks.<sup>36</sup> Nothing more happened until a notice appeared in the San Joaquin Republican of May 10, 1855 that stated, "A meeting of the stockholders of the Southern Miner's Steamboat Association will be held as soon as Mr. Sperry, in whose possession are the books and papers, returns."<sup>37</sup> The Stockton papers did not carry any more accounts or editorials about the Southern Miner's Steamboat Association. A careful observer of California at that time could well make the statement, "The California Steam Navigation Company owns nearly all the vessels running on the routes to the interior."<sup>38</sup>

During February and March of 1855 a small gold rush had started to the diggings along the Kern River in the southern San Joaquin Valley. To take advantage of the

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., February 18, 1855.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., May 10, 1855.

<sup>38</sup>Titus Fey Cronise, The Natural Wealth of California (San Francisco: H. H. Bancroft and Company, 1868) p. 676.



large number of gold seekers wanting transportation from San Francisco to the Kern River, the California Steam Navigation Company tried to run a small steamer on the upper San Joaquin River. The Daniel Moor was advertised as leaving Stockton for Fort Miller and intermediate landings on Thursday the eighth of March at twelve noon.<sup>39</sup> A letter to the editor of the San Joaquin Republican the next day pointed out that it was impossible for any steamboat to navigate the San Joaquin River more than a few hundred yards above Dr. Edgar's ranch. That ranch was five miles down river from Fort Miller. The author of the letter also pointed out that the highest point upstream ever reached by any steamboat was Royal's ranch, fourteen miles below Fort Miller.<sup>40</sup> The newspaper apologized for the wording of the advertisement and announced that "the Daniel Moor had left on a trip up the San Joaquin for the purpose of thoroughly testing the practicability of navigating that stream with light draught steamers."<sup>41</sup>

Another small river steamer from Sacramento, the Kate Bateman, of "about one cat power" was noted advertising

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<sup>39</sup>San Joaquin Republican, March 7, 1855.

<sup>40</sup>Letter, San Joaquin Republican, March 8, 1855.

<sup>41</sup>San Joaquin Republican, March 9, 1855.

for passengers for the Fort Miller diggings.<sup>42</sup> This voyage was on an even shadier basis than that of the Daniel Moor for, "The Steamer Kate Bateman disappeared from wharf in Stockton at an early hour Sunday the 12th without paying any wharfage to the harbor master."<sup>43</sup>

The Daniel Moor returned to Stockton on the fifteenth of March. She had only been able to get fifteen miles up-river from Fort Washington. When the river became too shallow for further progress, her passengers and most of her crew deserted and started on foot for the Kern River diggings. A volunteer crew brought the ill-starred little craft back to Stockton. She then returned to her home port of Sacramento.<sup>44</sup> A letter to the editor of the San Joaquin Republican gleefully reported that the captain of the Daniel Moor had gotten lost, mistaking the Tuolumne River for the San Joaquin. The Daniel Moor sailed up the Tuolumne as far as Tuolumne City before realizing the mistake.<sup>45</sup> The crew of the Kate Bateman never reported the movements of their craft. Interest in the Kern River diggings waned and there were no more attempts to run small steamers to Fort

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., March 10, 1855.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., March 13, 1855.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., March 17, 1855.

<sup>45</sup>Letter, San Joaquin Republican, March 17, 1855.

Miller.

Throughout the remainder of 1855 and during the entire year of 1856, the California Steam Navigation Company was unopposed by any steamboats operating on the San Joaquin River between Stockton and San Francisco. The company maintained a schedule of trips, daily except Sundays, with two steamboats. The Cornelia and the Urilda usually were the two steamers assigned to the run. The J. Bragdon replaced the Cornelia when the latter was withdrawn for overhaul in March of 1855.<sup>46</sup> The company's advertisements during the early part of April, 1855, announced that the Helen Hensley and the Urilda would maintain the Stockton-San Francisco run.<sup>47</sup> The papers never carried any items concerning the Helen Hensley's arrival or departure during that period of time.

The J. Bragdon, whose full name was John Bragdon, was two hundred and fifty feet long, drew nine feet of water, and had thirty-five foot paddle wheels. She ran from San Francisco to Stockton direct, being too large for the many intermediate stops at the ranches and farms in the delta.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>San Joaquin Republican, March 27, 1855.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., April 17, 1855.

<sup>48</sup>Jerry MacMullen, Paddle-Wheel Days in California (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1944) p. 44.



On April 28, 1855, she landed two hundred and forty tons of freight in Stockton for a week's total of over one thousand tons of freight. When the Cornelia had been thoroughly overhauled, refitted, and repainted on June 1, 1855, the company decided to keep her in reserve since she was not as large as the other two steamers on the Stockton run.<sup>49</sup> The Cornelia was placed back on the run with the Urilda in January of 1856.<sup>50</sup>

The California Steam Navigation Company enjoyed an almost absolute monopoly on the passenger trade on the San Joaquin River between 1854 and 1871. In February of 1855 they had standardized or equalized the passenger fares on the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers. This removed one of the biggest objections that the citizens of Stockton had to the "combination". In the freight trade, whatever rates the company set had to meet the competition of the small sailing schooners. These independent, privately owned vessels defied monopolistic mergers and consolidations. They were too small and too cheap to build and operate for any one to corner the trade. They continued to flourish on the San Joaquin River. Their presence kept the "combination" reasonably honest and prevented practices that

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<sup>49</sup>San Joaquin Republican, June 1, 1855.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., January 25, 1856.

would have forced the merchants of Stockton to organize again.

There were often as many as three of these small sailing sloops or schooners in Stockton Channel at one time.<sup>51</sup> The reports of the harbor master for these years indicate that the sailing vessels accounted for over one third of the total trade that passed through Stockton during the years.<sup>52</sup> The fees that the harbor master of Stockton collected during these years were an important source of revenue to the city. It was estimated that the harbor master's collections for the fiscal year 1855-1856 totaled over twelve thousand dollars, out of a total revenue for the city of seventy-six thousand dollars.<sup>53</sup>

If the merchants of Stockton were still vitally concerned with the establishment of a competing steamboat service on the San Joaquin, they were offered the opportunity. The following advertisement appeared in the daily San Joaquin Republican on January 1, 1856.

The steamer Anne Abernathy, now lying at Sacramento, in perfect good order, can be bought out at two hours notice.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., March 15, 1855.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., March 13--May 29, 1855.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., May 15, 1855.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., January 1, 1856.

This vessel was the companion to the Willamette, both owned by the Citizen's Line of Marysville, that the editorial had suggested for purchase one year before. The owners of the Anne Abernathy were probably aware of the introduction of the Norman bill to the California state legislature that year. The Norman bill contained provisions that would have regulated steamboat companies in California and restricted monopolistic practices. The bill passed the state Senate but was defeated in the Assembly in April, 1856.<sup>55</sup> The San Joaquin Republican, despite its name, backed the Democratic Party. It blamed the defeat of the Norman bill on the Know-Nothing Party, which was strongly represented in the state Assembly in 1856. The newspaper claimed that the Assemblymen had been bought by lobbyists employed by the "combination".<sup>56</sup>

When elections for the city council of Stockton approached in May of 1856, there was fear, openly expressed, that the "combination" might influence the local elections.

If the steamboat combination could afford \$50,000.00 to defeat Mr. Norman's bill before the late legislature, how much can they afford to spend on our municipal election to get a council that will favor them?<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., April 15, 1856.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., May 1, 1856.

<sup>57</sup>Editorial, San Joaquin Republican, May 3, 1856.



The fears expressed in the above editorial were not mentioned again. Either the fears were groundless or the "combination's" efforts were unsuccessful. The "combination" evidently didn't appreciate the charges because the advertisement of the California Steam Navigation Company, which had appeared in the San Joaquin Republican regularly since the creation of the company, was discontinued in July of 1856.<sup>58</sup>

From 1856 until 1871, the California Steam Navigation Company maintained its monopoly of the steamer trade between Stockton and San Francisco. The trade was routine and the advertisements of the company reflected the indifference of the "combination". A list of steamboats that might be used on the river was given, and the list was for the period of a complete year. No specified ship was ever listed as sailing on a given day or even during a given month. Completely indifferent to the public and its sensibilities, the "Arrangements" listed were those of the preceding year. The daily advertisements for the first part of 1861 would still be printed as "Arrangements for 1860".<sup>59</sup> A passenger had no idea on which steamboat he would travel.

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<sup>58</sup> San Joaquin Republican, July 1, 1856.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., July 3, 1861.

Since the size, speed, and accommodation of the vessels listed in the advertisement differed widely, it was important to have foreknowledge of the vessel.

The steamers Eclipse, Antelope, Cornelia, Helen Hensley, and J. Bragdon were listed on the advertisements as available for the run from 1859 through the middle of 1863. They left at four in the afternoon from both Stockton and San Francisco.<sup>60</sup> The rates were reduced on October 29, 1861 to three dollars per ton of freight.<sup>61</sup> In August of 1863 only the Yosemite, Cornelia, Helen Hensley, and the Chrysopolis were listed.<sup>62</sup> By May of 1865 the advertisement listed the Julia, Cornelia, Yosemite, and Chrysopolis.<sup>63</sup> It should be noted that these lists of vessels were for the company's operations on both the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers. The Chrysopolis was built as a fast, luxurious passenger and mail boat for the Sacramento River trade. Her appearances on the San Joaquin, if any, were rare.

On September 18, 1869, the rates of passage from San Francisco to Stockton were reduced to two dollars for a

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., January 1, 1861.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., December 31, 1861.

<sup>62</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, August 3, 1863.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., May 6, 1868.

cabin and one dollar and a half for a deck fare.<sup>64</sup> The rates were lowered again on November 2, 1869 to one dollar and a half for cabin and one dollar for deck passage.<sup>65</sup> These fares continued in effect until the company was sold in 1871.<sup>66</sup>

Commencing November 2, 1869, the California Steam Navigation Company advertised merely that they "will dispatch one of their first class passenger boats to San Francisco every day, Sundays excepted, at two p.m."<sup>67</sup> The boats used on the run were the Julia, Amador, and the Cornelia but their names were never used in the advertisements. The company didn't guarantee that any particular vessel would be used.<sup>68</sup> In July of 1870, the sailing time was changed from two p.m. to twelve noon.<sup>69</sup>

Two serious floods plagued the San Joaquin River during this period. The flood that occurred during 1868 was the greatest recorded during historic times.<sup>70</sup> It

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., September 27, 1869.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., January 31, 1870.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., April 2, 1871.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., January 31, 1870.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., July 27, 1871.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., July 30, 1870.

<sup>70</sup>Wallace Smith, Garden of the Sun (Los Angeles: Lyman House, 1939) p. 209.



reached a height of forty-six feet in some places.<sup>71</sup> The flood during the winter of 1861-1862, though not as great, caused many difficulties along the river. All the ferries across the San Joaquin up to Firebaugh were impassable. Even at that point, riders had to ride in water more than four miles, often swimming their animals. This occurred in the middle of June 1862.<sup>72</sup>

The high water resulting from these floods was the cause of a brief period of navigation on the Mokelumne River. Dr. D. G. Locke wanted to establish steamboat navigation on the Mokelumne as far as his little settlement of Lockeford. The first vessel that attempted the trip up the Mokelumne, the one hundred and ten foot Fanny Ann, got only as far as Woodbridge. Dr. Locke refused to give up and bought the double-engined steamboat Pert for the sum of four thousand dollars. The Pert was successful. She and another steamer called the O. K. navigated the Mokelumne River for three years under the ownership of the Mokelumne River Steam Navigation Company.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Cronise, op. cit., p. 325.

<sup>72</sup>William H. Brewer, Up and Down California, ed. Francis P. Farquhar (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930) p. 275.

<sup>73</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 45.

During the year 1867, six hundred and nineteen steamboats and four hundred and forty-seven sailing vessels arrived and departed from Stockton. Over eight hundred and sixty-four thousand bushels of wheat were shipped from the city, all by river boat.<sup>74</sup> Much of this wheat had been transhipped at Stockton from steamers and barges on the upper San Joaquin River, the Tuolumne, and the Stanislaus rivers. The California Steam Navigation Company ran the steamer Tulare every Tuesday at eight a.m. and the steamer Empire City every Saturday morning at eight a.m. up the San Joaquin River to Watson's Ferry and intermediate landings.<sup>75</sup> The same company also ran the steamer Fresno and a barge on a charter basis to any and all points on the Tuolumne and upper San Joaquin rivers.<sup>76</sup>

There was competition on the upper San Joaquin River and its tributaries. The Merchant's Line advertised the steamers Visalia, Arrow, and Christiana as leaving Stockton every Monday morning for Hill's Ferry, Firebaugh, and Fresno City, returning on Sunday. Large barges were also towed if the freight was heavy.<sup>77</sup> The Christiana was a forty ton

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<sup>74</sup>Cronise, op. cit., p. 317.

<sup>75</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, August 2, 1869.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., May 6, 1865.

sternwheeler, built by the Ling Brothers of Stockton.<sup>78</sup>  
The steamers Harriet and Clara Crow also ran on the upper river trade. The Harriet left Stockton every Saturday at eight in the morning for Watson's Landing and intermediate points. The Clara Crow was listed as simply making weekly trips between Stockton and Dover.<sup>79</sup>

The freight rates of six dollars per ton charged by the steamboats operating on the upper San Joaquin River were exactly double those charged between Stockton and San Francisco. The trade was still brisk and the steamers and the barges were usually loaded to capacity.<sup>80</sup> It should be remembered that Watson's Ferry was two hundred and fifty miles south on the river, three times the distance between Stockton and San Francisco by riverboat.<sup>81</sup> During high water periods, the steamboats could go twenty miles further upstream from Watson's Ferry to Sycamore Point.<sup>82</sup>

The trade on the upper San Joaquin River was a seasonal operation. The Tulare and Empire City were taken

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<sup>78</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>79</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, August 2, 1869.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.



off the run the last of August.<sup>83</sup> The low level of the water in the rivers toward the end of the dry season would not allow them to carry a heavy enough cargo to make a profit. The Harriet and the Clara Crow stopped operations for the season on September 8, 1869.<sup>84</sup> During the season of 1871 another independent steamer, the Clara Belle, was advertised for the run between Stockton and Watson's Landing.<sup>85</sup>

The steamers Tuolumne City and Fresno left Stockton for Tuolumne City and intermediate points every Tuesday and Friday at eight in the morning.<sup>86</sup> The Tuolumne City was a ninety foot sternwheeler built in Stockton in 1868 by Steven Davis for nine thousand dollars.<sup>87</sup> The low water made this a seasonal operation also. The Tuolumne City made her last trip of the year on July 27, 1871.<sup>88</sup>

On April 3, 1871, the California Steam Navigation Company became part of the Central Pacific Railroad. The change was hardly noticeable. The same advertisements were used in the daily papers, except for the change in

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<sup>83</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, September 2, 1869.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., September 9, 1869.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., March 17, 1871.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., May 13, 1870.

<sup>87</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

<sup>88</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, July 27, 1871.

the company's name. The same steamboats were used, the sailing times were the same, and the fares remained the same.<sup>89</sup> The monopoly that the California Steam Navigation Company had maintained on the steamboat service between Stockton and San Francisco was being taken over by another monopoly. The Central Pacific Railroad Company had paid \$620,000 for the company and its vessels. During the period of its existence from 1854 to 1871, the California Steam Navigation was reported to have paid its stockholders dividends which amounted to more than three hundred per cent. Upon dissolution of the company, the stockholders received in cash almost exactly what they had originally invested.<sup>90</sup> The Central Pacific Railroad was not particularly interested in river transportation and soon converted most of the river steamboats into ferryboats for San Francisco Bay. The rest were either scrapped or abandoned.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., May 1, 1871.

<sup>90</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER VI

### NEW LINES, OLD LINES, NEW LINES

When the California Steam Navigation Company, the "combination", was taken over by the Central Pacific Railroad Company early in 1871, the next few years were lean ones for steamboats on the San Joaquin River. The trade upriver on the San Joaquin from Stockton to Firebaugh, Hill's Ferry, Watson's Landing, Tuolumne City, Dover, and Grayson thrived and continued to grow. The steamboats were not controlled by the Central Pacific Railroad and offered the ranchers and farmers of the San Joaquin Valley a welcome and cheap opportunity to avoid the high rates set by the railroad. The railroad had bought out the "combination" to remove the competition on the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers between the steamboats and the railroad routes between Stockton and Sacramento and San Francisco. As noted in the last chapter, the Central Pacific Railroad management reduced and then abandoned its steamboat service on both rivers.

Stockton did not register any noticeable protest as the Central Pacific Railroad reduced the steamboat services. The sailing vessels provided cheap insurance that the vital freight would be adequately handled. The passenger service



provided by the steamboats was no longer vital to Stockton since the completion of the Western Pacific Railroad. The river traffic was taken for granted by the spokesman for the civic interests of Stockton. They focused their attention on the new railroad construction in the San Joaquin Valley.

Vestiges of the old pioneer days of steamboating on the San Joaquin River of the early 1850s, the days of the independent-owners and captains, remained. Even as the "combination" died and the Central Pacific Railroad started its service, individuals attempted to restore competition to the steamboat service between Stockton and San Francisco. Sporadic at first, the new independents grew, merged, and then faced new competition from another steamboat line from the Sacramento River. The new competitors engaged in rate wars until they too merged to face the competition from railroad and truck transportation.

The California Steam Navigation Company still maintained its monopoly of fourteen years of steamboat service between Stockton and San Francisco when a new stern wheel steamer was launched in Stockton on August 8, 1868.<sup>1</sup> She was named T. C. Walker for her captain, and was "built expressly to be run as an opposition on the line between

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<sup>1</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, September 21, 1868.

this city (Stockton and San Francisco."<sup>2</sup> Her entrance into Stockton Channel on her first upriver voyage from San Francisco was spectacular. As she approached her moorings near the Eldorado Street bridge, she fired rockets and roman candles to celebrate the occasion.<sup>3</sup> The Stockton Daily Independent did not rejoice at the return of competition and mildly wished, "May her brilliant entrance into the harbor be the precursor of a long, popular and useful career."<sup>4</sup>

If the newspaper was not excited about the return of competition, the Stockton City Council recognized a new opportunity. The old wharfage charges in effect during the long period of the "combination" monopoly were changed within a week of the T. C. Walker's first round trip. The city had charged the steamers of the "combination" a flat twenty-six dollars per round trip. All other ships using the city's wharves had to pay fifteen cents a ton on their registered tonnage.<sup>5</sup> At the fifteen cent rate, the single trip charge for the Julia of the "combination" would have been over seventy-seven dollars, or one hundred and forty-five

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., October 1, 1868.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., October 5, 1868.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., October 5, 1868.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., October 7, 1868.

dollars per round trip. The new wharfage fees imposed by the Stockton City Council were a flat ten cents per registered ton for all vessels.<sup>6</sup> The newspaper warned that the council's action might hurt the river trade since the city of Sacramento only charged half as much for its wharf fees.<sup>7</sup> The council was unimpressed, perhaps because wharf revenues for the month of September 1868 totaled over sixteen hundred dollars. The total city revenue for that month was just over thirty-six hundred dollars.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the wharfage fees charged each vessel for the use of the city wharves, the city also taxed each item of cargo loaded or unloaded. Lumber was taxed at fifteen cents per one thousand feet, cattle at fifteen cents a head, and horses at twenty-five cents a head.<sup>9</sup>

The T. C. Walker maintained a schedule from San Francisco to Stockton of three round trips per week, charging three dollars for passengers and fifty cents extra for meals and beds.<sup>10</sup> In the rate war that followed between the T. C. Walker and the "combination", freight

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., October 10, 1868.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., October 6, 1868.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., October 9, 1868.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., October 7, 1868.



charges were reduced to one dollar per ton.<sup>11</sup> The competition proved unprofitable and on May 24, 1869 a notice in the Stockton newspaper announced that, "T. C. Walker will discontinue her daily trip until further notice, to be laid up for repair."<sup>12</sup> Although the T. C. Walker made an appearance in Stockton again in July 1869, she was no longer advertised as offering regular service between San Francisco and Stockton.<sup>13</sup>

Civic minded citizens of Stockton had been alarmed when monopoly threatened the steamboat commerce on the San Joaquin River during the 1850s. Why were they so disinterested and complacent about the same monopoly of steamboat transportation in the late 1860s and early 1870s? An editorial in the Stockton Daily Independent of June 14, 1870 provided a clue. A San Francisco newspaper had commented that the freight traffic on the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers had been seriously crippled by the completion of the Central Pacific Railroad. The Stockton paper reflected the town's rather smug acceptance of the status quo when it wrote:

The railroad does not carry nearly two-thirds;  
it is doubtful whether it carries one-third of the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., November 22, 1868.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., May 24, 1868.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., July 20, 1869.

freight destined to this section. The boats of the California Steam Navigation Company have, during the past four months, brought to this port more freight than in any corresponding period during the last ten years. . . . As to the sailing vessels; they are doing but little on our streams at the present, but that has always been the case at this season. When the crops are harvested and begin to seek a market. . . our harbor and rivers will be thronged by the usual complement of sailing craft and we consider it unlikely that these conditions will be changed until a strictly valley road, free from steep grades such as are found on the Western Pacific will connect the San Joaquin Valley with the Stockton Ship Channel.<sup>14</sup>

Officially, Stockton wasn't concerned with the monopoly of the California Steam Navigation Company and it was even less concerned when the railroad monopoly replaced the old "combination". No matter what happened, there would always be the little schooners and sloops to carry the freight to and from the city wharves.

Following this pattern of unconcern, there was no protest or notice taken when the Central Pacific Railroad dropped its advertisements in February 1872. A few lines were added to the railroad timetable, listing the arrival and departure times of daily steamers to San Francisco.<sup>15</sup> No names of boats were ever listed. The steamers Cornelia, Cora, Julia, and Amador were used interchangeably on the run

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., June 15, 1870.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., February 1, 1872.

even though their names were never advertised.<sup>16</sup>

In March of 1872 another opposition steamer arrived. The Stockton Daily Independent noted the event with the rather strange comment of, "Opposition steamer Chin-du-Wan, Thursday March 14 at eleven a.m. Merchants, businessmen, and travelers will govern themselves accordingly."<sup>17</sup> The owners felt obliged to take the following advertisement in the same paper.

Opposition steamer Chin-du-Wan has resumed her trips and come to the rescue of the oppressed people. Fare \$1.00. Freight \$1.00 per ton. If the people who dwell by the rivers, by giving a generous support to the Opposition Boats are but true to themselves they possess in the waters that flow by them an unfailing remedy against monopolies that control land transportation. The waters can never be bound in the shackles of iron that fetter the land. J. P. Zimmerman, Captain.<sup>18</sup>

The response to the competition offered by Captain Zimmerman and his Chin-du-Wan followed the same pattern as that experienced by the earlier opposition steamboats. The Chin-du-Wan ran for several weeks and then her name was no longer mentioned in the accounts of the arrivals and departures of the ships from the wharves in Stockton.

On September 10, 1872 the Central Pacific Railroad

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., February-August 1872.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., March 11, 1872.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., March 28, 1872.



ran its last timetable for river steamers leaving Stockton for San Francisco.<sup>19</sup> From then on the wharf reports merely mentioned the shipment of wheat by steamer to Antioch.<sup>20</sup>

The Central Pacific Railroad had abandoned direct service by river steamboat between Stockton and San Francisco. Only a shuttle service was maintained from Stockton to Antioch. Stockton passengers and freight could transfer at Antioch to the main line boats that ran from Sacramento to San Francisco.<sup>21</sup>

The independent operators had not given up despite the fact that, officially and editorially, Stockton was little concerned whether they survived or not. When one independent gave up, it was not long before another entered the San Joaquin River trade. The Chin-du-Wan was gone, her Captain Zimmerman had died in January of 1873.<sup>22</sup> The same month saw the entrance of a new independent steamboat on the San Joaquin, the Hattie Fickett. Launched in December of 1872 on Mormon Slough in Stockton, she entered service

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., September 10, 1872.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., September 19, 1872.

<sup>21</sup>V. Covert Martin, Stockton Album Through the Years (Stockton California, 1959) p. 80.

<sup>22</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, January 7, 1873.

on January 28, 1873.<sup>23</sup> She was the lightest draft boat ever built in Stockton up to that time.<sup>24</sup> Her maiden trip, significantly, was to Crow's Landing and she was advertised as running from Hill's Ferry to San Francisco, touching at Stockton.<sup>25</sup>

The independent steamboat operators had found that there was no profit to be made in passenger operations. But there still were good profits in carrying the freight on the San Joaquin River, particularly on the upper section of the river between Stockton and Watson's Landing. The Hattie Fickett was designed for this profitable trade and made no attempt to carry passengers. This same practice was followed when another new river steamboat was built and launched in Stockton on June 22, 1873. Built in the Mormon Slough shipyard of C. M. Small for a company headed by Captain T. C. Walker, the new steamboat was one hundred and fifty-two feet long, thirty-eight feet wide, but drew only four feet of water when carrying a capacity load of four hundred tons.<sup>26</sup> She was named the Alice Garratt in honor of the daughter of the State Senator from San

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., January 28, 1873.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., January 9, 1873.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., January 31, 1873.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., June 23, 1873.

Francisco.<sup>27</sup> The Senator was later listed as vice-president of the new California Steam Navigation Company when it was formed.<sup>28</sup> An illustration of the individual participation of the owners in these independent steamboat enterprises was the fact that the owner of the Alice Garratt was listed as her captain, while her builder performed the duty of first mate.<sup>29</sup> The Alice Garratt was designed to carry only freight and that is the role she performed for her first years on the San Joaquin River.

On August 10, 1874 there were four steamboats tied to the wharves at Stockton; the Hattie Fickett, Tulare, Clara Belle and the Alice Garratt.<sup>30</sup> Only one of them provided any accommodations for regular passengers. That was the Tulare, the small steamboat used by the Central Pacific Railroad to maintain connections between Stockton and Antioch. The profit on the San Joaquin River was to be made in freight, particularly wheat.

J. D. Peters had long been a leading merchant in Stockton, shipping huge quantities of wheat and other ag-

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., August 2, 1879.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., August 11, 1879.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., August 2, 1879.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., August 11, 1874.



ricultural products out on schooners, sloops, barges, and steamers to San Francisco. He decided to eliminate the middleman involved in shipping goods on the San Joaquin River and purchased barges and tugs to operate himself. An example was the barge Excelsior; one hundred and thirty feet long, thirty feet wide, and six feet deep.<sup>31</sup> That was the size of the average steamboat operating on the San Joaquin River at that time. The barge was to be towed by the steam tug Frolic from Stockton to San Francisco and back.<sup>32</sup> Peters and his partner, Cornwall, refused to pay the regular wharfage fees on their barges Excelsior and Commerce to the Stockton city harbor master, claiming that the city discriminated against barges in favor of the steamboats.<sup>33</sup>

The owners of the Alice Garratt decided to attempt passenger as well as freight business after using the steamboat as a freighter only for over a year. She was placed on a twice weekly run between San Francisco and Stockton.

The two steamers running to San Francisco in one day is an arrangement that has at least relieved the monotony on the levee for two days in the week. Large crowds on the levee to see the Alice Garratt and the Enterprise leave. . .

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., June 20, 1874.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., August 4, 1875.

Probability of an increase of travel between this city and the bay.<sup>34</sup>

The Enterprise had replaced the Tulare on the Central Pacific Railroad's shuttle run to Antioch. The passenger trade was modestly successful and was continued. Sometimes both vessels were so lightly loaded that they engaged in races down the river.<sup>35</sup> At other times the Alice Garratt carried over two hundred passengers on one trip, one hundred and forty of whom were Chinese, crowded into a large room below decks.<sup>36</sup>

The success of the Alice Garratt produced the first newspaper advertisement on January 10, 1876. The company was called the Independent Line, and sailings were listed for Mondays and Thursdays at four p.m.<sup>37</sup> The Alice Garratt became a regular sight on the San Joaquin River between Stockton and San Francisco. A list of her cargo for one trip downriver from Stockton to the bay in 1876 gives an idea of the type and variety of the cargos that were shipped out of Stockton at that time. The cargo consisted of 1,520 sacks of wheat, 800 quarter sacks and

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., December 24, 1875.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., December 30, 1875.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., December 28, 1875.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., January 10, 1876.

200 half sacks of flour, 34 barrels of glue, 37 rolls of leather, 20 salted hides, 13 bundles of sheep pelts, 16 head of cattle, 2 horses, 79 sacks of onions, 15 coops of poultry, 9 baskets of fish, 19 boxes of eggs, 6 sacks of tule roots, 4 barrels of wine, 5 sacks of wool, 3 kegs of nails, 3 pianos, and one sewing machine.<sup>38</sup>

The Alice Garratt continued to maintain her twice weekly schedule until the arrival of another new steamboat on December 18, 1876. This was the City of Stockton, built in Stockton at the Davis shipyard at Lindsay Point.<sup>39</sup> The new steamboat was two hundred feet long, fifty feet wide, and her hull was eight feet deep. She provided forty-eight cabins with two beds each for passengers.<sup>40</sup>

The new steamboat was not really a competitor. She was owned by the same men who had built and operated the Alice Garratt, and the familiar name of T. C. Walker was listed as her captain.<sup>41</sup> The Alice Garratt was withdrawn and hauled out of the water for repair and refitting. Of particular interest was the item that sixteen cabins were

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., February 4, 1876.

<sup>39</sup>George H. Tinkham, History of San Joaquin County (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1909) I, p. 27.

<sup>40</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, December 18, 1876.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.



being added.<sup>42</sup> The owners evidently intended to stay with their passenger experiment.

The new City of Stockton took over the Stockton to San Francisco run maintaining a regular schedule departing Stockton every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.<sup>43</sup>

Observers in Stockton, who watched the repairs to the Alice Garratt progress, wondered what would happen when she was ready to operate on the river again. "What her work is to be is a matter of conjecture. . . As one vessel is now sufficient for the river trade between this city and San Francisco, it is presumed that the Alice Garratt may be put on another route."<sup>44</sup> Her owners shared the opinion that there was room for only one regular vessel on the San Francisco-Stockton run. When the Alice Garratt was repaired, she was put on the Stockton run and the City of Stockton was moved to San Francisco.<sup>45</sup>

Another new item in the newspapers of July 1877 was the first appearance of a new company with an old name. The California Steam Navigation Company advertised the

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., February 24, 1877.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., January 13, 1877.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., February 24, 1877.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., March 31, 1877.

sailing of the Alice Garratt, with T. C. Walker as captain.<sup>46</sup>  
 This was the second company to use the name, the first having  
 been dissolved after purchase by the Central Pacific Rail-  
 road in 1871. The company had control of several ships  
 besides the Alice Garratt, including the City of Stockton  
 and the Centennial. The Centennial had been built in Stockton  
 in the same shipyard and immediately preceeding the con-  
 struction of the City of Stockton. She was used on the  
 Sacramento River and also held the distinction of being  
 the largest vessel used on the upper San Joaquin River.<sup>47</sup>  
 On one voyage she transported 6,000 sacks of wheat from  
 Hill's Ferry to Stockton.<sup>48</sup>

The City of Stockton was used as a reserve vessel  
 by the new California Steam Navigation Company. Besides  
 being employed on the Sacramento River while the steamer  
Centennial was being repaired, she filled in for the Alice  
Garratt on the San Joaquin and once took a party of ex-  
 cursionists three miles out to sea through the Golden Gate!<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., July 11, 1877.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1877.

<sup>48</sup>Workers of The Works Progress Administration of  
 Northern California, The Central Valley Project (Sacramento:  
 California, 1938) p. 31.

<sup>49</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, September 10, 1877.

In September of 1877, the City of Stockton returned to her home port for another purpose.

The new California Steam Navigation Company decided in September of 1877 to start daily service between Stockton and San Francisco, using two steamboats. There had been a steady increase in freight as well as passenger traffic. Always carrying a good load, the Alice Garratt had been leaving fully loaded on at least half of her trips.<sup>50</sup>

Another group felt that there were new opportunities for profit on the passenger and freight trade between San Francisco and Stockton. The California Transportation Company, organized by Nelson and Anderson, and operating steamboats on the Sacramento River, began operations on the San Joaquin River.<sup>51</sup> On September 29, 1877 the steamboat Constance, owned by the California Transportation Company began operations.<sup>52</sup> The Constance, somewhat smaller than the City of Stockton, was one hundred and fifteen feet long, thirty-two feet wide, and five and one half feet deep. She was three years old when she entered service to Stockton.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., September 20, 1877.

<sup>51</sup>J. M. Guinn, History of The State of California--Biographical Record, (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1909) II, p. 327.

<sup>52</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, October 1, 1877.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., October 6, 1877.



In December of 1877, the California Transportation Company replaced the Constance with a new vessel for the Stockton-San Francisco run. The replacement was the Onward. A sternwheeler larger than the Constance. The Onward was one hundred and sixty-six feet long and had accommodations for one hundred and thirty passengers. Separate quarters were provided for Chinese passengers in the hold.<sup>54</sup> The Constance was on a schedule of two round trips per week between Stockton and San Francisco, starting on January 9, 1878, and departed Stockton at ten in the morning.<sup>55</sup> The steamers of the competing line, the California Steam Navigation Company, left Stockton at four in the afternoon and maintained a daily, except Sunday, schedule.<sup>56</sup>

A third independent company, operating the steamer Herald, entered the San Joaquin competition in August of 1878. Her owners adopted the same rates as the other two lines and ran the Herald on a twice weekly schedule, leaving Stockton on Tuesdays and Thursdays at four p.m.<sup>57</sup> The Herald was unable to make a profit on a regular schedule and was soon withdrawn to operate on a rather informal,

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., December 4, 1877.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., January 31, 1878.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., August 28, 1878.

irregular basis. She became a favorite excursion boat for group outings. On one instance, she carried three different Sunday School picnic groups on excursions up the San Joaquin River on three consecutive days.<sup>58</sup> At other times she was employed as a tramp steamer, where and when profitable cargos could be found.<sup>59</sup>

When the operators of the Onward and the Herald withdrew from regular service on the San Joaquin River in 1878, the vessels of the California Steam Navigation Company continued to provide daily schedules of passenger and freight service. With the exceptions of Sundays, steamers belonging to this company, left the head of Stockton Channel daily. The City of Stockton, Mary Garratt, and Alice Garratt were used to maintain the service.<sup>60</sup> One of the three would be laid up for repair, overhaul, or just as a reserve vessel to guarantee the maintenance of the daily service. The company also owned the Centennial but she was used for other purposes and only utilized on the San Francisco run in extreme emergencies.

One such emergency occurred in August of 1879. The City of Stockton had been out of commission for several

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., May 2, 3, 4, 1881.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., April 21, 1881.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

months, under repair and then in reserve. She was put into service on August 29 while one of the other two vessels was withdrawn for repair. While loading at the dock, the seams in her hull opened and she filled with two feet of water.<sup>61</sup> The Centennial, also in reserve, was hastily moved along side. The freight deck of the City of Stockton was already under water as her cargo of wheat was transferred to the Centennial. Much to the surprise and horror of the sweating crews and stevedores, the seams of the Centennial also opened and she settled into the mud alongside the City of Stockton.<sup>62</sup> The head of Stockton Channel was completely blocked for a week by the two sunken ships.<sup>63</sup> Both were raised and returned to service within a few weeks.

There was enough passenger and freight traffic moving in and out of Stockton during the 1880s to insure a profitable operation for one company. First class fare on the railroad between Stockton and San Francisco was three and one half dollars. For the same amount, or less, a passenger could obtain a comfortable outside cabin on the river steamer, enjoy an excellent dinner, and arrive in San Francisco before breakfast after the overnight river

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., August 30, 1879.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., September 6, 1879.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.



voyage.<sup>64</sup> Few passengers at that time were in a hurry, and comparative speed was the only advantage that railroad travel offered. As a result the papers often reported that the steamers arrived or departed with a capacity passenger list.

In 1889, The California Steam Navigation Company changed its name to the California Navigation and Improvement Company.<sup>65</sup> The Improvement represented, among other things, the shipyard that the company maintained at Stockton.<sup>66</sup> Three new names appeared on the list of vessels operated by the new company. These were the J. D. Peters, built in 1889; the second T. C. Walker; and the H. J. Corcoran.<sup>67</sup> The Mary Garratt and the City of Stockton were retained by the new company during the 1890s. The Alice Garratt and the Centennial, being the oldest and the smallest vessels, were the first to be dropped. The City of Stockton, had the distinction of having the first electric lights aboard any far-western steamboat. They were placed in glass shades shaped like

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., February 3, 1881.

<sup>65</sup>Directory of Stockton City - 1891, (San Francisco: F. M. Husted, 1891) p. 28.

<sup>66</sup>Jerry MacMullen, Paddle-Wheel Days in California (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1944) p. 85.

<sup>67</sup>Martin, loc. cit.

calla lillies.<sup>68</sup>

The Union Transportation Company made its appearance on the San Joaquin River in 1892.<sup>69</sup> Once again there were two companies competing for the passenger and freight trade between Stockton and San Francisco. The company was given the nickname of "New Line".<sup>70</sup> The name California Navigation and Improvement Company was not very old but the public rightly considered it to be the "old" California Steam Navigation Company. From 1892 until the early 1920s, The Old Line and The New Line were competitors on the San Francisco-Stockton steamboat service.

The Union Transportation Company introduced the new steamer Captain Weber into service on June 10, 1892.<sup>71</sup> She was considered the fastest of the Stockton steamboats.<sup>72</sup> James Gillis was president of the company. His wife, Sarah, exercised a controlling interest in the company. She belonged to the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Because of her influence, the vessels of the Union Transportation Company were the only vessels on the San Joaquin River which

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<sup>68</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>69</sup>Martin, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>72</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 93.

did not serve liquor.<sup>73</sup> The steamer Dauntless was also used on the San Joaquin and, in company with the Captain Weber, provided a daily schedule between Stockton and San Francisco.<sup>74</sup> The company's vessels left the north side of Stockton Channel at five p.m.<sup>75</sup>

The period from 1892 to 1914 was the golden era of steamboating on the San Joaquin. The freight traffic was heavy and profitable. The competition between the Old and New Lines was fierce and they tried to outdo each other in providing service and comforts for their passengers. The vessels were large, comfortable and relatively fast. When the T. C. Walker provided nightly concerts on her trips to San Francisco, the New Line countered with Ladies Night on their vessels.<sup>76</sup> The Dauntless was even used for special Sunday trips to Antioch and back so that passengers might enjoy a daylight trip through the delta of the San Joaquin River.<sup>77</sup>

The newspaper could report, "Both New and Old Line steamers are doing an extensive business. Transfer business

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Stockton Evening Record, April 8, 1895.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., July 24, 1895.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., July 30, August 4, 1895.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., June 29, 1885.



is particularly large."<sup>78</sup> In winter, when the commerce on the river slowed down, the New Line would curtail its service to one vessel while the other was being repaired. The Old Line, maintained a full winter service with its larger fleet, even while decommissioning one or two for the season.<sup>79</sup>

Accidents still occurred but not as often as in the early days. The most common accident on the steamboats on the lower San Joaquin was a broken shaft from engines to the paddle wheels.<sup>80</sup> Although the boat would be disabled by the accident and have to be towed back to Stockton, the repairs were simple and could be performed in a few days. There were many minor collisions, as between the Dauntless and the J. D. Peters. Some of these could be attributed to the competition between the two lines that often led to races.<sup>81</sup> The most serious accident occurred when the T. C. Walker exploded on November 27, 1898. The entire forward superstructure of the vessel was demolished and nine men killed, yet the T. C. Walker was repaired and reentered service.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., May 25, 1895.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., November 6, 1899.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., May 18, 1895.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., August 21, 1895.

<sup>82</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 32.

The competition reached its most cut-throat state in the year 1900 when fares were reduced to fifty cents for passage, and one dollar for a cabin.<sup>83</sup> The Union Transportation Company was then purchased by a Sacramento firm and became the California Transportation Company.<sup>84</sup> That was another name which was not new to the San Joaquin River, vessels of the company having operated between Stockton and San Francisco for a short time in 1878.<sup>85</sup> A side effect of the change in ownership of the Union Transportation Company was the interior of the Captain Weber. The new owners installed a bar and the dining room was enlarged to occupy the entire breadth of the vessel.<sup>86</sup>

The "new" New Line withdrew the Dauntless and the Captain Weber from the San Joaquin River. In their place they ran the Constance, the Columbia, the Isleton, and the Aurora.<sup>87</sup> As stated before, the California Transportation Company was a Sacramento operation. The San Joaquin River and the Stockton-San Francisco trade was a secondary concern. The Dauntless caught fire and burned to the water

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<sup>83</sup>Stockton Evening Record, March 20, 1900.

<sup>84</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>85</sup>Guinn, op. cit., p. 327.

<sup>86</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>87</sup>Stockton Evening Record, October 11, 27, 1909.

line in Stockton Channel in 1910. Towed to midstream, she sank. The hull was raised and repaired and became the diesel freighter San Joaquin.<sup>88</sup> The Captain Weber returned to the San Joaquin and Stockton. After many more years of service, she was retired. It was ironic that the end of the Captain Weber was the same as that of her old running mate, the Dauntless. The Captain Weber burned and sank in Stockton Channel on May 22, 1943. The hulk was raised and towed away to be converted into an elevator barge.<sup>89</sup>

By the year 1914, the competition between the Old and New Lines was slowing. The California Transportation Company had reduced its schedule to a three round-trips per week basis. The Old Line boats still maintained a daily sailing.<sup>90</sup> The first World War reduced the New Line's schedule to two sailing per week, on Mondays and Saturdays.<sup>91</sup> The more aggressive Old Line sought opportunity from adversity when it advertised:

Uncle Sam urges curtailment of gasoline.  
Leave your auto at home and travel by steamer.  
Daily at 6 p.m. Fare \$1.00; children five to

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<sup>88</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>90</sup>Stockton Evening Record, February 10, 1914.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., October 8, 1918.



twelve 50¢; children under 5, free. Meals 50¢; single berths 50¢; family rooms, \$1.00 for three persons; rooms 75¢ to \$2.50.<sup>92</sup>

By the end of the first World War, the New Line was only offering one trip per week. The Captain Weber left Stockton at six p.m. every Saturday for San Francisco and Oakland.<sup>93</sup> The Old Line was still offering a daily schedule and had changed its wartime patriotic appeal to a peacetime, "Back to Normalcy" appeal of, "For convenience, comfort, and superior service, travel by steamer."<sup>94</sup> The appeal had the desired result, plus the fact that the competing New Line had almost abandoned service from Stockton to San Francisco. By the year 1920, the Old Line had added the steamer Pride Of The River to maintain its daily schedule. The fare had been raised to one dollar but the prices for meals and staterooms remained the same.<sup>95</sup> By the year 1922, the Old and New Lines had combined operations on the San Joaquin River. They still retained their respective names of the California Transportation Company and the California Navigation and Improvement Company in the advertisements. The three steamers, Captain Weber, T. C. Walker, and J. D. Peters

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., November 22, 1918.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., June 8, 1920.

were kept in service. The fare had been raised to one dollar and twenty cents.<sup>96</sup> The advertisements remained the same through the end of 1924.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., October 9, 1922.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., October 8, 1924.

## CHAPTER VII

### UPRIVER ON THE SAN JOAQUIN

It was the gold rush of 1849 that created the first commercial navigation on the San Joaquin River. Stockton became the transportation and supply center for the southern mines. During the 1850s the riverboats depended on the supplies and passengers going to the mines for their main source of income. In the 1860s, as the mining of gold decreased and the commerce to and from the southern mines diminished, a new source of trade and profit developed for the operators of the steamboats on the river. It was the transportation of the huge grain crops, particularly wheat, of the central San Joaquin Valley. For almost forty years, the farms and ranches of the region were one of the world's foremost wheat producing areas. The San Joaquin River and its tributaries; the Tuolumne, Stanislaus, Merced, and the Fresno rivers flowed through the heart of the wheat growing region. During the 1860s irrigation in the central San Joaquin Valley was in its infancy. The flow of the rivers had not been seriously affected by the diversion of water for irrigation. Except in very dry years, there was sufficient water in the upper San Joaquin, that stretch between Stockton and Fresno Slough, for shallow-draught



vessels to operate on an almost year-round basis. As settlement of the valley increased, more and more river water was drawn off for irrigation purposes, and the level of the rivers steadily dropped. The upriver steamboats were increasingly restricted in the distance up the San Joaquin they could travel. They could only move during periods of high water, usually the time from May to October. By good fortune, the harvest time of the grains occurred during that time of year. It was a time of feverish activity at the landings along the upper river; a race against time and falling river water levels to load the huge crops on the steamers and the barges. The huge crops of grain continued to be produced long after the water in the rivers had fallen to such a low point that the light draft steamers could no longer operate. The state engineer advocated the dredging of the upper reaches of both the San Joaquin and the Sacramento. The state legislature at that time was under the domination of the Southern Pacific Railroad and ignored the repeated recommendations of the state engineer.<sup>1</sup>

Hydraulic mining in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains helped strangle the navigation of the upper San Joaquin and its tributaries. Tremendous quantities of sed-

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<sup>1</sup>Wallace Smith, Garden of the Sun (Los Angeles: Lyman House, 1939) p. 248.

iment were washed into the streams and gradually raised the level of the stream beds, thus lowering the amount of water that the stream would hold in its banks.

The transportation of the grains and the other agricultural products from the upper San Joaquin River basin were the lifeblood of river's commerce. The port at Stockton based its prosperity on the transshipment of the agricultural products. The big riverboats that traveled from Stockton to San Francisco also depended on the transshipment of those same products for the bulk of their cargos and profits. As the water level dropped in the upper San Joaquin so did the prosperity of the entire commercial navigation of the entire river.

In the early 1860s, as the grain crops in the central San Joaquin Valley reached huge proportions, a number of individual operators ran steamboats to the upriver landings. Many of them continued in operation after the first California Steam Navigation Company moved into the upper San Joaquin River trade. There were regular runs to Dover, Watson's Landing, Hill's Ferry, Grayson, and Firebaugh on the San Joaquin and Fresno Slough and to Empire, Paradise, and Tuolumne City on the Tuolumne River.<sup>2</sup>

The Tuolumne River was the first to suffer from

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<sup>2</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, January 29, 1862.

low water. Farmers above Tuolumne City waited in vain for the steamers to arrive and take away the tons of grain they had brought to the water's edge.<sup>3</sup> By 1871 the water level at Tuolumne City was too low for the steamers and barges.

In the early 1870s, steamers like the Clara Crow and the Empire City could start the upriver season the first week of April.<sup>4</sup> By September 21 the river was too low, and the last steamboat returned to Stockton for the winter.<sup>5</sup> Even at that time the wheat was still waiting at the upriver landings for the steamers that couldn't reach them. One day's shipment of wheat out of Stockton was over eighteen hundred tons, even after the upriver season had closed.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes a steamer could navigate the low water levels but the huge barges they towed, heavily loaded, could not make it over the shallows. The construction of an irrigation dam across the entrance to Fresno Slough hampered navigation to Watson's Landing. In 1876 the Clara Crow arrived in Stockton from Watson's Landing minus her barge. The Clara Crow was able to sail across the low dam, but the barge

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., April 8, 1872.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., April 9, 1872.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., September 21, 1872.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., September 19, 1872.



was stuck behind it.<sup>7</sup>

During the winter months the shallow draught upriver steamers usually remained idle at the wharves in Stockton.<sup>8</sup> Some were repaired, often completely rebuilt.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes the steamers were used on other trips or for special purposes during their slack season. The Clara Crow made trips down river to the islands and San Francisco Bay during the winter.<sup>10</sup>

The California Navigation and Improvement Company had a fleet of versatile upriver steamers. They included the Leader, the J. R. McDonald, and the A. C. Freese.<sup>11</sup> While their usual assignment was to tow a barge upriver to Firebaugh or Modesto, they also towed barges to Port Costa, Napa, and other landings on the lower San Joaquin River and San Francisco Bay.<sup>12</sup>

The barges used on the upper San Joaquin River were as important as the steamboats themselves. The city council of Stockton recognized this fact by charging them fees equal

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., April 13, 1876.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., December 6, 1879.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., March 14, 1876.

<sup>10</sup>Stockton Evening Record, September 2, 1895.

<sup>11</sup>Jerry MacMullen, Paddle-Wheel Days in California (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1944) p. 85.

<sup>12</sup>Stockton Evening Record, April 19, 1895.

to those charged the steamboats.<sup>13</sup> Since the barges were often as large as the steamboats and carried more cargo, the city showed excellent business sense. One barge was three hundred and twenty feet long by fifty feet wide and could transport eighteen thousand sacks of wheat. She drew five feet of water and that limited her usefulness on the upriver trade.<sup>14</sup>

The steamboats were all sternwheelers. They could not use the usual tow line fastened to the stern. The tow rope was fastened instead to the main hog-post, a stout mast amidships on the towing steamboat.<sup>15</sup> Since there were many bends on the upper San Joaquin River and the barges were extremely clumsy, there were rudders on the barges as well as the steamboats. A helmsman sat in a small tower, raised above the cargo level, and operated the rudder on the barge.<sup>16</sup>

In 1899 steam barges were introduced on the San Joaquin River but they confined their operations to the lower river and the islands of the delta. The first barge of this type

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<sup>13</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, May 3, 1881.

<sup>14</sup>Workers of The Works Progress Administration of Northern California, The Central Valley Project (Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1942) p. 31.

<sup>15</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

was the H. S. Wright. She was one hundred and seventy-five feet long and was powered by steam engines.<sup>17</sup>

By 1906 the level of the San Joaquin River had dropped so low that service to Firebaugh had to be abandoned. The J. R. McDonald made the last trip. The water level had dropped so fast that the steamer was stranded. After several weeks of negotiations, officials of the nearby irrigation district opened the gates of a dam to release enough water to float the J. R. McDonald. She made a hasty trip to Stockton with the last swell of navigable water.<sup>18</sup> Unable to rely on the availability of steamboat and barge transportation for their crops, the farmers and ranchers turned reluctantly to the hated railroad. The end of true river navigation on the San Joaquin was at hand.

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<sup>17</sup>Stockton Evening Record, December 11, 1899.

<sup>18</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 84.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BEGINNING OF THE END

The prophecy made in the early 1840s about the valley and river named San Joaquin had come true. "A space sufficient for an empire! . . . the valley of the San Joaquin [sic] will become the abode of a dense population, the products of whose industry will float down the placid current of that river";<sup>1</sup> The valley was the abode of a dense population in 1925 but the part of the prophecy concerning the river was rapidly losing its ring of truth. Only the delta of the great San Joaquin River system, that part downstream from Stockton, witnessed any "products of industry floating down the placid current of the river."<sup>2</sup> The navigation of the San Joaquin River upstream from Stockton had completely ended. The commercial navigation of the San Joaquin downstream from Stockton was rapidly declining. By the year 1922, Stockton shipped only 117,044 tons of cargo downriver.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas J. Farnham, Life, Adventures and Travels in California (New York: Nafis and Cornish, 1849) p. 326.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>United States Congress, House of Representatives, Letter from Secretary of War, 68th Congress, Second Session, January 8, 1925, Document #554 (Washington: Government Printing Office 1925), p. 87.

The commercial interests, the city fathers, the river-boat owners, and especially the San Joaquin River pilots had long agitated for a deep water channel from Stockton to Suisun Bay.<sup>4</sup> In the early plans, the deepwater canal or channel was part of a larger plan to deepen the upper San Joaquin as well. These plans envisioned a network of navigable channels and the year-round maintenance of navigable water from Fresno to San Francisco Bay.<sup>5</sup> There had been numerous attempts to improve the navigation on the entire San Joaquin-Sacramento River system.<sup>6</sup> For various reasons none of these proposals materialized into concrete fact. Perhaps the most important factor that caused these proposals to fail was the lack of a concerted and determined action by the civic and commercial interests of Stockton. The city and port of Stockton had the most to gain by improved navigation of the entire San Joaquin River system. By the year 1925, those interests had joined together in a drive to win federal aid for improved navigation. The forces marshalled were strong, persistent, and victorious.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Stockton City Directory 1873-1874, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup>Stockton Daily Independent, February 2, 1892.

<sup>6</sup>Robert De Roos, The Thirsty Land (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1948) p. 17.

<sup>7</sup>United States Congress, House of Representatives, loc. cit.

But they did not seek to restore navigation to the San Joaquin, they were interested in a deep water channel to Stockton only. So the beginning of construction of the deep water channel to Stockton was really the final blow struck in the destruction of commercial navigation on the San Joaquin River. Irrigation had drained away the necessary water, hydraulic mining had filled the river beds with sediment, and political support was lacking to fight for state and federal appropriations to restore and maintain even a minimum of navigation on the San Joaquin.

The depth of water in the Stockton deep water channel depended almost entirely on the tidal stages and it was almost independent of any flow of the San Joaquin River.<sup>8</sup> That simple fact probably prevented any further attempts to restore navigation to the San Joaquin upstream from Stockton.

It is the opinion of the United States Army Engineers that commercial navigation above tidal reach of the river is impracticable because the river bed is generally so shallow and steep that an adequate water depth cannot be provided without complete canalization of the stream. The expense of such a plan appears to be greater than the benefit would justify.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>United States Bureau of Reclamation, Department of The Interior, Central Valley Basin (Washington: Government Printing Office, August, 1949) p. 169.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



For uncounted thousands of years, the San Joaquin River had been evolving. Changing its flow and path again and again, it created a valley so rich in soil that it helped destroy the river when the river's waters were completely diverted to irrigate the soil. During the few thousands of years that the Indians monopolized the San Joaquin Valley, the river was deep, clean, and clear. It was a source of food and refreshment in a countryside that turned brown and barren during half the year. Along its banks grew the live oak that nourished and the tules that housed, clothed, and transported the Indians.

The Spaniards used the river's banks as highways to explore the valley, though they seldom launched boats to float on its waters. The horseback riding Spaniards and Mexicans were never able to appreciate and utilize the easier transportation that the surface of the river offered.

The American and Canadian beaver hunters who spent a score of years along the San Joaquin's banks were men on horseback, too. It was ironic that the men who used the river the least, saw it when it was the deepest and clearest. How often must the pilots on the upriver steamers of the 1890s longed for the deep, free flowing San Joaquin River that Jedediah Smith rode beside!

When the discovery of gold in 1848 brought the first flood of settlers to the San Joaquin Valley and the foot-

hills of the southern Sierra Nevadas, the San Joaquin River became the artery that carried the lifeblood of supplies. The early town of Stockton depended on the river for its existence and it appreciated that fact. The ships, the wharves, the rates, the arrivals and the departures were of prime importance to the entire town. The entire energy of civic interest was turned against any force or problem that concerned the river trade.

When grain and the other products of farm and ranch replaced gold and mining supplies as the lifeblood of Stockton's commercial activity, the city still considered the harbor and the river as its heart and lifeblood. Gradually an attitude of unconcern replaced the former interest in matters of river trade. The river trade seemed to take care of itself. When the wharves were loaded with hay and grain, the fleet of little schooners and sloops always managed to carry it away, high or low water, competition or monopoly.

The advertisements for the steamboats grew smaller and were moved further back in the newspapers. The accounts of every imaginable event, problem, and proposal about the river trade that the papers once carried became shorter and shorter until they disappeared. Where the daily arrivals and departures; the vessel's names, tonnage, and cargos; the races, the accidents, and the pleasures of riverboats

once filled the pages of the newspapers, a two line item hidden in the classified section sufficed. The newspapers accurately charted the city of Stockton's loss of interest in the navigation of the San Joaquin. For years the readers of the daily papers followed inch by inch the construction of the railroads in the San Joaquin Valley. The proposals to dredge and maintain navigation on the upper San Joaquin River went almost unreported. When a new paper started operation in Stockton, its editors seemed to sense the almost forgotten importance of the river navigation to the city. For a time, the editors would attempt to rekindle the public and civic interest in the river trade. Gradually, they too lost interest and the river items grew fewer and were buried deeper each issue. The San Joaquin Republican, the Stockton Daily Independent, and the Stockton Evening Record all followed that pattern, reflecting a dying interest in the importance of commercial navigation on the San Joaquin.

The golden era of the navigation of the San Joaquin River lasted from the 1860s to the beginning of the first World War. This was the time that the upper San Joaquin and its tributaries funneled a wealth of trade into Stockton to be shipped out again to the bay region. The period was all too brief. The farms and ranches that were producing the bumper cargos were at the same time draining the river



of its water. The first World War gave the river trade a brief reprieve, since all transportation was utilized to the utmost in the war emergency. The "return to normalcy" that followed the war meant that the old problems had to be faced. The upriver trade was gone. All efforts were being concentrated on the construction of a deep water channel to connect Stockton with the sea. The proposed new channel was for ocean vessels. As long as the great ocean freighters could unload and load directly at Stockton, and no one was interested in reopening the upper river, there was no role left for the riverboat.

The decision to construct the deep water channel to Stockton killed commercial navigation on the San Joaquin River itself. The corpse lived on for a few more years. The Captain Weber made the last passenger run from Stockton to San Francisco on Christmas Day in the winter of 1932.<sup>10</sup> The idle steamboats were anchored along the sides of Stockton Channel or at a "boneyard" at Buckley Cove during the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> For brief periods they might be used to play the part of

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<sup>10</sup> Jerry MacMullen, Paddle-Wheel Days in California (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1944) p. 118.

<sup>11</sup> Workers of the Works Projects Administration, History of Stockton and San Joaquin County (Stockton, California, 1938) p. 185.

Mississippi River steamboats in Hollywood movies.<sup>12</sup> Some were destroyed by fire or converted to barges and the survivors were taken over by the Army as troop transports during the second World War.<sup>13</sup>

With the construction of the Central Valley Project during the early 1940s, the San Joaquin River became a vein in the circulatory system of the Central Valley instead of an artery. The entire flow of the San Joaquin River itself was dammed behind Friant Dam and then diverted to irrigate the upper third of the San Joaquin Valley.<sup>14</sup> That is the part of the valley that does not drain back into the San Joaquin System.<sup>15</sup> The San Joaquin, deprived of its own mountain water, has become a drainage system to draw off the waste water from the irrigated fields. That is its function in the Central Valley Project. It is a role that does not allow for the restoration of navigation on the San Joaquin River in the foreseeable future.

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<sup>12</sup>MacMullen, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>14</sup>Richard C. Wood and Leon Bush, The California Story (San Francisco: Fearon 1957) pp. 303-307.

<sup>15</sup>United States Bureau of Reclamation, Department of the Interior, Central Valley Basin (Washington: Government Printing Office, August, 1949) p. 83.

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